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Drawn by L. R. Gustavson to illustrate "Gold Ahoy!" beginning on page 4

"Nahiena!" came the hag's voice. . . . From the bones on the floor rose a girl. Yet she was real.

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Except for stories of Real Experience, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence.

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GOLD AHOY!

A swift-paced novel of gold-rush days in California.

By GORDON KEYNE

"AMERICA for Americans! Come on, boys! Clean 'em out!"

A chorus of yells shrilled up from the crowd; angry, furious yells. Abner Dent turned to look, curious to see what was happening. The slogan was repeated. Men were coming on the run from all directions, with shovels, pistols, rifles, to the fore.

"America for Americans! Out with 'em! Pitch in, everybody!"

Dust was puffing up from the throng in front of the stores and shacks that straggled along the higher ground. It moved slowly toward the sheds on the river-bank, toward the boat-landing. The crowd was milling along; it was less a crowd than a mob.

White powder-smoke plumed, as a shot exploded. The mob split apart. A dozen or more men erupted from its ranks, men bloody and battered and frightened, who ran full speed for the landing. Several of them were screaming in wild terror. Another shot, and another, sounded; one of the fugitives pitched headlong, rolled over and lay kicking. More guns banged out. Axes and knives glittered in the afternoon sunlight.

Astonished, alarmed, incredulous, Abner Dent stared at the scene. He saw the fugitive figures pile into two boats at the landing and push off, in mad panic. They frantically rowed downstream, pursued by hoarse yells and jeers. Boisterous laughter seized the bearded, red-shirted, pistol-girt throng. It was cruel laughter, for men had died here, and the man last shot was kicking out his life, unregarded.

"America for Americans! That's the way to handle 'em!" somebody shouted joyously.

Dent turned to a strapping, whiskered miner near by, who was calmly watching these proceedings.

"What does it mean, friend?" he asked. "Why were those men run out of camp?"

The miner surveyed Dent inquiringly.

"Stranger, huh? Seen you come in on the boat awhile back. Seaman?"

"Marblehead," replied Abner Dent.

"Too bad. Hoped you'd say Maine. Aint met two Maine men since I come out. Well, I reckon Baker's Camp is gettin' cleaned up shipshape."

"But why?" persisted Dent. "What had those men done?"

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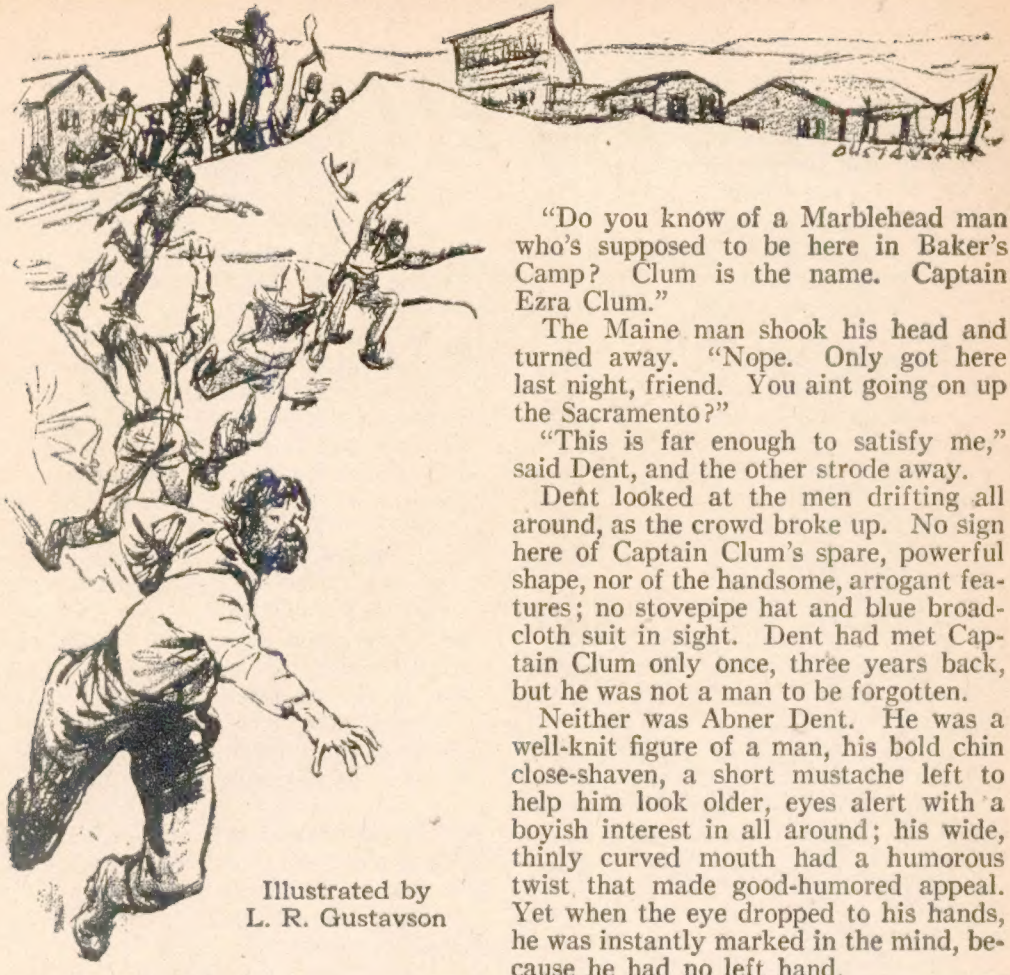


Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson

"Got born in the wrong place." The other grinned. "They was Chileans and greasers, and we're tired o' furriners pouring in to take what's ourn. Lots of us fought in the Mex war, and we don't like greasers nohow. They're gettin' run out, all over Californy; every gold-diggings is running 'em out. Chinks too. They can do what they like, so long's they don't work no gold-claims. This here 'arth belongs to us Americans!"

LITTLE as Dent knew about the diggings, he had heard of the resentment that was welling up over the influx of foreigners, and of the brutally efficient action being taken to clear them out of the gold-camps. Life was cheap, law non-existent, and every man carried pistols to use in a pinch.

"So that's it, eh?" he rejoined. "But how about the Frenchman who was to take me back to Frisco in the morning? He has a freight-boat, I understand."

"Won't bother him none," said the Maine man. "Frenchmen gettin' kicked out too, but they can do as they like so long's they don't take up mining claims."

"Do you know of a Marblehead man who's supposed to be here in Baker's Camp? Clum is the name. Captain Ezra Clum."

The Maine man shook his head and turned away. "Nope. Only got here last night, friend. You aint going on up the Sacramento?"

"This is far enough to satisfy me," said Dent, and the other strode away.

Dent looked at the men drifting all around, as the crowd broke up. No sign here of Captain Clum's spare, powerful shape, nor of the handsome, arrogant features; no stovepipe hat and blue broadcloth suit in sight. Dent had met Captain Clum only once, three years back, but he was not a man to be forgotten.

Neither was Abner Dent. He was a well-knit figure of a man, his bold chin close-shaven, a short mustache left to help him look older, eyes alert with a boyish interest in all around; his wide, thinly curved mouth had a humorous twist that made good-humored appeal. Yet when the eye dropped to his hands, he was instantly marked in the mind, because he had no left hand.

Where the hand should have been was a hook of elaborately carved hardwood. As Dent's left wrist was usually in his jacket pocket, however, the hook was not often noticed.

"Did I hear you mention Cap'n Clum?" said someone beside him.

At the voice, Dent swung around. Beside him was a forlorn and tattered man, so thin and scrawny and straggle-bearded as to seem a scarecrow; but the dark eyes were alive with intelligence.

"Aye," replied Dent.

He expected a request for money or food. During his few days in California he had met plenty of broken and disheartened men. In these early days of 1850 life was a roaring blaze of success or battle for many a man; but for a many more it was a chaos of broken dreams and hopes gone to wreckage.

"If you'd tell me your business with Cap'n Ezra, I might point you the way," said the scarecrow. "But not if you intend him trouble and unkindly action."

Dent laughed. "Not I! When I landed in San Francisco a few days ago, I heard he was here, so I came to see the

diggings and collect two dollars he borrowed from me three years ago. If the sum will irk him, then I'll forgo collection. One Marblehead man doesn't cause sorrow to another for such a sum."

"Oh!" said the other. "And you didn't see the Cap'n in Frisco?"

"You seem unduly suspicious," observed Dent, a trifle nettled. "If Clum is here, point the way or else be off on your own affairs."

"Look at the shack yonder." And the scarecrow indicated a hut upstream at the end of the line of shacks. "You have an honest face, good sir; I'll trust it that far at least. No, Cap'n Clum has no need of money. He has sold out his claims—well, go to the shack yonder and seek your bent, and you may give a helping hand to a deserving soul."

The scarecrow slipped away and was lost among the raucous-voiced throng.

Puzzled and uncertain, Dent headed upstream along the path. He had met Captain Clum only once, in Havana; so far as Marblehead went, Clum's name was all but forgotten. A dour, stiffish man, hard as nails, he had long since deserted Marblehead. He was said to have a family in foreign parts; many elaborate stories were told of his doings, and it was hinted that he had occasional dealings with the Evil One; even this bad name had faded out with time, however.

Abner Dent saw no more of the scarecrow figure, though he looked hard enough. A queer air of fantastic whimsy in the man had pricked at his interest, and had also hinted at mystery.

Sunset was not far distant. The cabin ahead appeared deserted; like the others, it was a hodge-podge of boards and tin and canvas and mud, and was not inviting. Dent almost regretted having come, for into his twenty-two years was packed much New England caution. Too late now to draw back, though; he kept on.

DENT'S background was simplicity itself: Marblehead, and the Seven Seas. When four of the family perished in the burning whaler *Jenny Lee,* the shock had taken his mother; he was alone now. Jilted by a canny Marblehead lass who preferred a cotton-mill worker's pay to that of a mate, and a two-handed man, to a crippled one, Abner Dent still carried a rough spot in his heart where women were concerned.

His caution, since reaching Eldorado, was highly indicative of inner strength. In this land of gold and madmen, he had not lost his head at all; he had shrewdly decided against the temptation to rush for the diggings. In San Francisco Bay lay many a tall ship empty, all hands gone to the gold-camps; here was sure fortune and no gamble, because what ships did leave port paid almost incredible wages, those plying to Oregon or Mexican ports offering enough to make an officer rich eventually.

None the less, it was hard to find men willing to leave this land of gold and wild hot blood and wilder rumors—so hard, in fact, that it was easier to shanghai a man than hire one, and a crew the same. Many a man disappeared overnight, wakening to find himself far outside the Golden Gate.

For Abner Dent, a short run ashore was enough. He had no mind to waste money on the high-priced food and lodging of the diggings, and he frankly preferred the clean orderly life on a calked deck to the disorderly, turbulent mobs of armed men and the uncertain gold gamble of the back country. To him, the decision was an easy one.

NOW, approaching the cabin for which he had been steering a course, Dent knocked at the ramshackle door.

"Who's there?" came a boyish voice, edged with surprise.

"Abner Dent of Marblehead, looking for Cap'n Clum. Quite a few Marblehead folks in San Francisco; they got a club in a restaurant there, and sent me on here."

"Oh! Somebody from Marblehead. . . . One minute, one minute!"

Dent was somewhat vexed by this reception, so different from the usual uproarious greetings between old townsmen from the East. As he waited, he became aware of an odor, an extremely appetizing odor that tickled his palate delectably.

"Beans, by gosh!" he exclaimed.

"Beans is right." The door swung open. "I had to get 'em out the oven. Come in! Did Cap'n Clum send you?"

Dent stared blankly.

"No. I was mate of the *Narwhal.* Got paid off at Frisco and came to take a look at the diggings and find the Cap'n. I lent him two dollars in Havana, nigh three year ago. I'm going back to Frisco in the morning. Scarecrow-looking man directed me here."

"Oh! That must have been Thady," said the other. "Come in, come in; maybe you'd like a dish o' beans?"

"Lord, yes!" Dent promptly stepped in. Thanks. Who are you?"

"Billy Clum. If Thady sent you, it's all right. Sit down and we'll eat. You haven't seen my father?"

"No. I thought to find him here."

Dent still stared; he could not help it. His host was slim, booted and belted, wearing a red flannel shirt. Above the shirt was a smooth boyish face, laughing eyes, and a wild mop of black hair.

"BAKED beans, ship's biscuit and coffee," said Billy Clum. "Back in no time."

He vanished into the second and rear room of the shack. Dent pulled a slab stool to the bare table, and sat down.

"I suppose you've got the gold-fever, too?" came Clum's voice.

"Not much." Dent laughed shortly. "I've seen enough. I'm going to ship again, after a look at Frisco, and take my time about it. So the Cap'n is your father?"

"Of course," floated back response. "And he's not here, but in San Francisco, so you ought to have seen or heard of him."

"Not a sign," said Dent. "Frisco, eh? Well, that's queer!"

"And you don't get your two dollars back till you find him."

Dent chuckled and glanced around. The room with its two bunks was surprisingly neat and clean. A sea-chest and a small leather trunk were near the door, apparently packed and locked and strapped; each bore the name of *Wm. Clum* in large, freshly painted letters. Billy Clum, obviously, was all ready to go—somewhere.

His host reappeared, hurriedly slapped dishes on the table, brought in biscuits and huge mugs of coffee, and finally a steaming bake-pan of beans, appropriately browned; then collapsed in a chair with a sigh and a laugh.

"There! Everything's ready. Father taught me to cook those beans. . . . What did you say your name was?"

"Abner. Mr. Dent, when aboard ship." Sniffing, eying the brown beans, Dent declared they seemed prime.

The youth smiled delightedly, with dark eyes sparkling.

"That's glorious! Father said if I could make 'em like a Yankee, then I could qualify."

"Eh? Dent suddenly remembered. "You mean that you belong to his folks down in South America?"

"I am his folks, yes; the rest are dead. I came up from Valparaiso to meet him with the bad news. . . . But never mind about all that. Start in, and we can talk later."

Dent obeyed, but uncomfortably. He had hit upon the secret now. It embarrassed him and made him awkward. He scarcely dared look at Billy Clum, but wolfed his food, and in his haste betrayed his own secret. The dark eyes went wide as he used that hook of his, but no comment was made.

He dared not mention his own discovery, but spoke heartily of the coffee, which was the best he had drunk in months. In return, his host asked about his life.

"Mine? Oh, nothing interesting," he rejoined. "I've been away to sea, mostly, the past six years. One whaling voyage, and that was enough for me; then two China voyages. Got my mate's position this spring, after I fetched the *Seaspray* home. Pirate praus laid us aboard after we cleared from Canton; killed the cap'n and mate. That's where I got this," he added, holding up his left wrist.

"Oh! And you can still command a ship?"

"Sure; only, a chief mate doesn't command, right often. They jumped me from third to chief, and that was lucky. Second mate has to hand the lines with the men, you know. Of course, in New York ships the chief mate takes the weather earing of a course, but it's a bad practice and going out of date. So I don't have to belay or go aloft. Tell me, where did you learn English?"

The other laughed softly. "There are plenty of English in Valparaiso—but I didn't learn it there. Ready to talk now? Smoke if you like—do."

Dent nodded and hauled forth his pipe. "That man told me your father had sold out his gold-mines."

"Eh? Oh, you mean his claims! Yes. He got part of the money; I have it here. He went to San Francisco to get the rest, and was returning immediately. That was five days ago, and we've heard nothing from him. I don't know what to do."

"LORD!" thought Dent, puffing his pipe alight. But there was no use dodging facts; might as well have the thing out. To think of her sitting on a bag of gold away up the Sacramento River, and waiting for a man who would not return. . . .

"You're in a fix, miss, sure enough," he said. "Something's wrong about your father, if he's not returned."

"Oh!" She caught her breath. Her eyes dilated upon him. "You—how did you guess—what makes you think—"

"From your hands. Look at this one!" Smiling, Dent extended his right hand. "Hard, rough, hairy, regular tar-bucket paw! Yours are like flowers. . . . And other little things, besides."

SHE looked hard at him; then a laugh struggled in her eyes.

"So that's why you became so awkward, all of a sudden! I didn't fool you a bit."

"You did, until you began to eat. You're sort of dainty about it; and that made me notice your hands," he replied gravely. She broke into quick mirth, and he was relieved that she took the disclosure so easily, naturally. "Why did you stay here all alone, miss? You should have gone with him."

"Father had to return here to settle up some little things," she said. "I had just arrived unexpectedly, you see. I came here pretending to be a boy, because everything was so rough on the ship coming north, and in San Francisco, that I was frightened; so I cut my hair and dressed as a boy."

"Yes, you look frightened," Dent said dryly, inspecting her face. "And you're too pretty for a boy, anyhow. D'you mean that this camp doesn't suspect you're a girl?"

"No. I haven't stirred out of this cabin, except at night. You see, Father said he would be back in two days at most."

"And he's not come. What about that man who sent me here?"

Her face cleared. "Oh, Thady! He's all right; he's been working for my father. He gets me anything I need. You can trust him."

"Well, what's the program? At Dixey's Restaurant, where all the Marblehead men in Frisco gather, they hadn't seen your father lately. I hate to say it, miss, but something must have happened; something important, or he'd have sent you word."

She nodded. "I know. When are you leaving here?"

"Early in the morning. A Frenchman has a boat here, loading freight."

"Then I'll go with you."

Dent frowned. "That boat is just an old sailing-craft. We'll have to beat up the coast and it may take days. No real accommodations; no place for a girl. What's your name, anyhow?"

"I'm not a girl. I'm nineteen, and I'm a woman, and I can take care of myself," she returned. "My name's Nahiena."

Dent stared at her. He had anticipated some Spanish name; her skin had a slight dusky tinge as from foreign blood, and he supposed that Captain Clum had married a Chilean woman. But this name startled him.

"That's odd!" he observed. "Nahiena! I've heard the name before; we made a long stay at the Sandwich Islands, when I was whaling."

Her teeth flashed white. "Good guess! Yes, my mother was a missionary's daughter there. We went to Valparaiso when I was a child. Father settled us there; you see, he had his reasons. But Mary's my name, also, if you like that better."

"No, stick to Nahiena. It's a pretty name."

"All right. Now, you can trim my hair shorter, and we'll take the boat in the morning. I have plenty of money. Wait till I put some wash on the line; that's a signal to Thady that I want him."

She was gone, with a lithe swiftness of movement that was almost startling.

DENT chewed on this information, uneasily conscious of some very curious forces at work. Her words hinted at strange things, of which she apparently knew nothing. He judged her to be a frank, capable young woman, mightily attractive and probably well able to take care of herself in a man's world.

But the figure of Captain Ezra Clum loomed in the background darkly austere, perhaps even sinister. He had married an island girl and then settled at Valparaiso—for reasons unsaid. Now he had left his daughter here, gone to Frisco, and stayed. Why? There was a heavy freighting business up the Sacramento, and boats were plenty; he did not lack for money; he had unfinished business here. Then why not return?

Murdered for his money, perhaps; anything was possible in San Francisco; yet Captain Clum somehow did not fit into such a possibility. He bulked too large. One could not imagine him falling victim to a chance footpad; one could not imagine him a victim at all, except to some tremendous malign force of destiny.

Turning his mind to Nahiena, Dent realized that she must keep her make-

"You don't want to look more like a boy! I'll trim your hair, not shorten it."

shift disguise until reaching San Francisco again; but there the wise thing would be to discard it. She had more to fear disguised than as herself. Rough as the diggings were, rough as the city itself was, and dangerous, women were respected by common assent; none were allowed to show themselves in bars or other haunts of men. Seamen's tales of wild night life in dance-halls and boozing dens were utterly false.

She returned, her eyes dancing, and laid a pair of shears on the table. When she had refilled the coffee-mugs, she drew up her stool beside that of Dent.

"Why do you think Father hasn't returned as he promised?"

"Can't tell. May be sick."

"You don't know him. Must be something worse than that."

To himself, Dent agreed; this was his very thought.

"Know where to look for him?" Dent demanded.

"Yes. His agents there are named Willock & Putney; they'll know all about him. Now, get to work on my hair and make me look more like a boy."

Dent laid down his pipe and resigned himself to the inevitable; after all, he might as well lend himself to help her find Clum. As he took the shears, he said as much quite frankly.

"You don't want to look more like a boy! I'll trim your hair, not shorten it. I can see you safe to Frisco; and once there, you must get back into your own clothes. You'll really be less conspicuous. Not even these heavy garments can entirely conceal your sex. A bonnet will hide your short hair, and I don't think you'll have a single thing to fear, as a woman. . . . Now, is this money of yours in gold?"

"There's some gold, not a great deal, and the rest is a draft," she rejoined. "You certainly give your orders, don't you? I like a man who does that; it's Father's way too. No *maybe* or *by your leave*—just 'do it and be damned to you'! I expect you're quite right about the clothes, and I'll be glad to change back, anyhow."

"Be sure to take a blanket or buffalo robe for the boat," said Dent. "It'll be cold on the river and the bay. Turn around, now; I'll have this done in a jiffy."

He was pleased by her meek acceptance of his orders; a reasonable person, he told himself. And he was amused and interested by her slightly foreign manner, by her vivacity, by the peculiar combination she displayed of reliance upon him and of cool self-assurance. She had an intimate, friendly way, too, which certainly was not inherited from Cap'n Clum.

The daylight was fading fast when he laid the shears aside. She rose, went to a broken mirror by the door, and exclaimed in delight as she viewed her appearance.

"Well, I guess I'll be going," said Dent. She flashed around.

"Don't be silly! You're staying right here till the boat leaves—" A knock at the door interrupted. "There's Thady now. Come in, Thady, come in! I'll get some candles and we'll be comfortable.... Thady, this is Mr. Abner Dent of Marblehead. Sit down, Abner, and stop gawking. Thady, want some beans? All right. Abner, get those two bottles with the candles in the neck, from that shelf over the bunks. I'll have the fresh candles in a minute. And you'd better take the bottom bunk for yourself. It's more comfortable."

She whisked out of the room, leaving Dent and the scarecrow looking at each other in smiling amusement.

Chapter Two

"A BRISK young woman," observed Dent. The other man showed his teeth in a laugh, then bowed and waved a graceful hand.

"Mr. Dent, your servant! While the appellation of Thady is ample for this land of informality, I may be permitted to say that the full name is Thaddeus Roscius Moberly, late of Mr. Gye's company at Covent Garden, and eke of various companies in Washington, New York, and other centers of the Thespian art in the Eastern States."

"I don't savvy it," returned Dent. "Are you a preacher?"

"Heaven forbid! Did you never hear of the stage, of actors?"

"Oh, an actor!" Dent picked up his pipe. "I never met one. I've heard they're a bad lot—no offense, however. I trust you're an exception. What's the name?"

"Let us stick to Thady, as more consonant with the environment."

"All right, Thady; and belay those big words, will you? This young woman is in a mess, it seems—"

"We'll speak of that aside," broke in Thady, jerking his thumb at the door. "We may take a stroll; I have a word for you apart."

Nahiena returned with candles.

The bottles were handed down from the shelf, the new candles stuck to the old ones, and a pleasant glow touched the darkening room. Nahiena went to the bunks, and from under the blankets drew forth a heavy money-belt, which she laid on the table.

"There's plenty of gold," she said. "Thady, I'm going to Frisco on the Frenchman's boat. Abner's going. You're going. So you'd better get the places."

"Hold on!" said Dent. "My place is already engaged."

"We'd better take the two trunks down, then, and get Miss Clum a place," said Thady. He had abandoned his flowery pose. "Why do you want me to go too, Nahiena?"

"We may need you. And Father owes you some money, too."

"I wanted him to keep it for me. If I take it, I'll spend it all on liquor. You know my failing," said the man bitterly. "I just can't have money—"

"Don't be absurd," broke in the girl briskly. "Brace up, now, and shake a leg!"

Dent broke into a laugh. Thady, despite his morose air, joined him in the laugh and went to the chest and trunk by the door.

"Needs must when beauty drives!" he exclaimed. "Come along, Mr. Dent."

"Abner, if you please. All right. Nahiena, we'll be back shortly!"

With money-belt and luggage, they stepped out into the night, Thady leading the way past the shacks and on to the landing. Neither man spoke, until they reached the spot where lay the Frenchman's flat-bottomed craft.

Dent, who had not previously met the Frenchman, was astonished as they sat in the cabin and Thady did the talking. A short man with mustache and goatee; short, yet with a military bearing, with a brisk and assured air; a handsome man who was possessed of a most singular and winning personality.

PAYMENT made and space arranged, Thady went out to take care of the luggage. Dent lingered, for the Frenchman had set out a bottle and glasses, and was pouring a drink which Thady had abruptly refused.

"Your health, sir," said the Frenchman, and clinked glasses. The wine was puckery to the mouth, but good. "You are seeking fortune, of course?"

"That's the common lot of man, isn't it? By the way, your name—"

"Raousset," said the other. "Here is a card with the full name, Mr. Dent. It

does not suit the ears of gold-seekers. I ask with a purpose—would you consider a venture in which fortune was certain and enormous?"

"WHO would not?" Dent regarded him curiously, wondering what was in view. "Why do you ask me, an utter stranger, such a question?"

"Because I seek men, and you attract me," said Raousset. "I am, or was, a soldier. I was on the French staff during the Algerian campaigns against Abd-el-Kadir. On the card is my San Francisco address. Come and talk with me there, if you're interested."

"A soldier, eh?" Dent lifted his left arm, to show the hook. "This prevents me from any such activity, my friend."

"So? On the contrary," exclaimed the other with quick animation. "Do you know that when a man has lost a hand, a limb, a member of any sort, nature compensates him by giving him more acute perception and ability elsewhere? A man who has lost an eye frequently sees farther and better than most men with two eyes. And from your face, I can tell that you have been given this very sort of compensation. I repeat, come and talk with me in San Francisco."

"Perhaps I shall do so; thanks for the invitation. First, I must find a person who has disappeared; it is Captain Ezra Clum. Do you know him?"

Raousset's face changed. "I've heard of him. A friend of yours?"

"I've only met him once, a long time ago."

"There's a man who might help you; calls himself Frank Fairhaven."

Dent frowned into the agile, brilliant eyes as Raousset stood up.

"I don't fancy mysterious allusions. If you've something to say, out with it!" he exclaimed bluntly. "What are you driving at?"

Raousset gazed at him for a moment, then waved a hand vaguely.

"Nothing definite. If Fairhaven is in San Francisco, I'll ask him; I may help you. Come to my lodgings there, and we can talk."

"Apparently you don't like Cap'n Clum."

"I do not," replied the Frenchman. "I've heard no good of him."

Inwardly fuming, yet impressed by the man, Dent said a curt good-night and stamped out, to join Thady. Under a lantern at the landing, he glanced at the Frenchman's card. It bore the rather fantastic name of Count Raousset-Boulbon. He stowed it away with an irritated oath and turned to his companion.

"Do you know anyone named Fairhaven, Frank Fairhaven?"

"Yes." Thady's voice was startled.

"Raousset said he might help find Cap'n Clum."

"Not likely." Thady halted. "I've got to tell you the truth: I worked for Clum; I did his errands and helped him. He made money in the diggings, by contracts and buying claims. He has his good side, but he's a bitter hard man."

"Few ever spoke good of him," growled Dent. "What about this Fairhaven?"

"A scoundrel, a rascal; a seaman like yourself, I've heard, but I know little about him and never met him. Captain Clum got the better of him in a deal at Chinese Flat. I'd not be surprised if the Captain had been murdered by this man."

Dent cursed anew. "I'm in a fog and I don't like it! I want to have things clear-cut and visible. Miss Clum knows nothing. The Frenchman hints around and will say nothing outright. You suspect a thing or two, but you slide away from the subject like an eel when I try to pin you down. Where there's smoke, there's fire. Well, then, what in God's name does it all mean? Spit it out flatly!"

"I wish I could; I know no more than you," said Thady. "She knows nothing at all, of course. That's why I wanted a word in private with you, since you're a man of purpose and action, undaunted by any gale that blows. I'm not. I'm a coward and a drunkard, with life in wreckage behind me. She needs help and advice, and you're the man to give it."

"I? GOOD LORD! I never saw her before today!" exclaimed Dent angrily. "Let some of her father's friends look after her!"

"He has none; here, at least," came the reply. "When she appeared, he was like a madman, upon my word! And why not? His wife dead, two other children dead, all of the plague; and this girl here, garbed as a boy! It was enough to unsettle any man. Especially one like Clum, with enemies everywhere."

"Enemies? Why enemies?"

"First, because he repelled friendship. Second, because there was something in the past that followed him. What? I know not. It is a mere conjecture. He was afraid of something. Perhaps it has caught up with him now."

"Bosh!" said Dent. "Who's this Fairhaven?"

"I don't know. I've seen him once or twice. I gather that he's a sea-captain like Clum; perhaps not."

"What the devil do you know?"

"Almost nothing, really."

"That seems true enough. What about the Frenchman, Raousset?"

"Oh, he's no secret! A soldier of fortune. Here at the diggings you can find lords and gentry, princes and paupers, every conceivable sort of man from every country under heaven. Raousset has some mad scheme of leading an army to Mexico and seizing that country, or so they say."

"Damn him and the lot of them, and all this impossible situation!" snapped Dent. "If Clum's dead, what's to become of this girl?"

"That's for you to settle with her."

"You fool, she's nothing to me! I can't charge myself with her!"

"There's many a one would be glad of the chance," said Thady.

Dent strode on in gusty anger. He was impatient of any mystery; and the mystery that seemed to envelop Captain Clum infuriated him.

BACK in the cabin, his irritation fled. Nahiena, cloaking inward anxiety with her gay laughter, was charmingly real and had no mystery. She had laid out some of Clum's spare garments to serve Thady, and ordered him to get himself shaven and shorn ere morning.

"You're to stay here tonight also," she said flatly. "You and Abner can have these bunks. I have a place in the other room; I prefer it. Then we'll be up and off together. Now, Abner, tell me something about Marblehead! I've heard of it all my life, and hope to see it some day."

Before he knew it, Abner Dent found himself talking away, gamming of ships and men and trade, spurred by the girl's interest and Thady's wide-eyed stare. Having been in Valparaiso more than once, he soon had Nahiena talking also, and the time slipped by like magic.

More and more, Dent found himself amazed by this girl's grasp on life. Left alone by the plague that had wiped out her family, knowing only that her father was somewhere in the California diggings, she had set forth to find him, and had succeeded. Dent could sense that in any time of crisis she would be cool, capable, far older than her years; here in this environment she was not at her best, for she was still bewildered by everything around. What a woman to walk a ship's deck and con the stars and heaven beyond!

"Look at this," said Abner Dent quietly.

But, reminded by recollection of the girl who had jilted him, he remembered that women were not for him—not the right kind, at least. When he curled up in the bunk, later, morose bitterness was upon him. The mood came, at times, and clouded everything in life. Neither liquor nor reason could banish it; only

Suddenly the hook caught the clerk's collar, and jerked him bodily across the counter.

the heaving sea and the racing scud could do this, for with them he was at home and supreme. On dry land, however, he was only a crippled man.

Chapter Three

ON the morning after their arrival in San Francisco, Dent was heading back to their hotel, and he was in a vile humor. He had not slept well; the lath-and-plaster hotel, hastily run up after the most recent fire in this city of recurrent fires, had been an unfortunate choice from a standpoint of comfort.

Also, his search for Cap'n Clum had resulted in vexation. Thady had disappeared somewhere last night and had not yet turned up. What with one thing and another, Abner Dent was in no frame of mind to put up with further annoyance.

He walked into the hotel to find commotion about the desk, and a crowd gathering. He caught sight of Nahiena standing there in a sparkle of anger. At

first he did not know her, for her face was framed in a bonnet and her slim figure was encased in a flowered gown; it was his first sight of her in her own proper garments.

Then he realized that the desk-clerk, a beefy man with heavy mustache, was pounding the desk and glaring at her, talking for the benefit of the gathering throng.

"I'll not have it! Ye walk in as a man, and now you show up as a woman! Either way, it's plain indecent, and I'll not have it in this hotel! It won't do, miss. Your kind don't belong here—"

"Tell it to me," broke in Dent, having elbowed his way through the crowd. "Come, now, spout it right out! What's your complaint?"

"Hello—you're the one who came with her!" bellowed the clerk, nothing loath to accept the challenge. "Mister, don't try to get gay with me. I got a pistol right here, and if you get sassy, I'll use it. Out you go, and her as well!"

"Look at this," said Dent quietly, holding out his left arm.

At sight of the hook attached instead of a hand, the other gaped. Suddenly that hook darted forward, caught the clerk's high collar and stock, and jerked him bodily across the counter. The pistol came too; with a roaring blast it vomited smoke and flame, but the bullet flew wild. Then Abner Dent really went to work.

The crowd yelled delirious approval. There was no question of right or wrong; a woman had been insulted, and a one-handed man was hammering the insulter. When the bartender came rushing in to the aid of the clerk, two bearded miners whooped and kicked him back into his bar-room.

The yelling throng watched Dent's operation with delight. This was something novel—hooking a man by his garments and shaking him into helpless futility while battering him mercilessly. As long as the garments lasted, all went well. When the hook tore free and a final blow knocked the hapless clerk to the floor, he was pounced upon and sent rolling out into the street by the laughing audience.

THE crowd pressed around, with back-slapping and congratulations and insistent demand that Dent join them in the bar.

"Thank you, gentlemen," he rejoined. "But I must see that Miss Clum, who is in my charge, gets placed in another hotel. Will you advise us where to go?"

Advise? The word caught the general fancy. In no time at all a procession was heading down the street, ankle-deep in dusty sand. Two men held Nahiena high on their arms; others surrounded Dent; the luggage was brought after. It was a roaring, merry, haphazard parade, with pistols banging away at the sky and hilarious yells ringing over the sandhills and the bay; it did not end until rooms had been secured at another hotel and the girl had thanked and dismissed her admirers.

Dent dropped into a chair, laughing. The flimsy hotel was still rocking to the tread of booted feet on the stairs.

"Well, I thought we'd never be alone again!" he observed. "San Francisco certainly rallied to the help of a lady in distress! Nahiena, you're a different person; you're like an angel! I never dreamed you'd look so wonderful in your own clothes!"

NAHIENA curtsied gayly, her starry eyes alight at the obvious sincerity of his praise.

"Thank you indeed, Abner! You just showed up in time; another minute, and I'd have gone for that silly fellow myself." She subsided into a chair. "No sign of Thady; well, he'll have no trouble finding us now, that's sure. I suppose you didn't learn anything about my father?"

Dent held a match to his pipe, nodding.

"Yes and no. Willock & Putney were distant and suspicious. They knew something, but refused to say anything except that he was safe."

"Well, thank goodness for that! Why wouldn't they say more?"

"They're your father's agents; they're right to be suspicious. They said that if I'd bring you, they'd give you full news of him. Have you anything to prove your identity?"

"Plenty! In my chest, though."

"Well, get it out, and we'll be off. Best go by the side door in case any of the crowd's lingering in front."

Another five minutes, and they slipped out of the hostelry unobserved.

When Dent went upriver a few days previously, the streets had been slithery mud from recent rains. Now they were ankle-deep in a fine impalpable sand, beaten into dust by the feet of thousands; even the board sidewalks were hidden from sight. Here and there, bottomless

muddy hollows had been filled in with packing-cases of useless goods from ships. The buildings were paintless, fire-scarred, gaudy with signboards.

Dent, with unashamed and eager boyish interest in everything around, cocked an eye at the waterfront; it was well calculated to amaze any seaman. His own recent ship lay at the Long Wharf, discharging cargo. Beyond was a forest of spars, where ships of every size and nature lay empty or idle. The crews had abandoned them in a frantic rush for the gold-fields, and they could obtain neither fresh crews nor any freight. One ship in ten managed to get clear of the harbor heads, by dint of some lucky stroke in getting men, or payment to the crimps who made shift to shanghai anything on two legs that could haul on a line—seamen, Indian, or "heathen Chinee."

Land sharks of all descriptions and of all races were battening on the thousands of victims who poured in through the Golden Gate. Few or none arrived from overland parties, for these went direct to the gold-fields, but here was the port of entry for the fresh shiploads arriving almost every day. The tremendous influx from every country of Europe was beginning to arrive. The whole world, indeed, was sending contingents to Eldorado, and coöperative groups in all lands were buying ships to bring them here, then abandoning the vessel. More than one tall keel was sand-bedded along the waterfront, serving as store or lodging-house; fantastically useless cargoes lay stacked along the shore in profusion.

The one thought in every mind had been gold. Now, with a general revolt in the diggings against foreigners, many of these were shrewdly taking to the towns and going into commerce, with results far more golden than the placers afforded. No one cared what the hasty structures were like; anything that would provide a roof against the rain and walls against fog and wind, was satisfactory.

The offices of Willock & Putney were not ornate or beautiful. The large outer room was thronged with loud-talking men whose pistols or revolvers were in evidence, and who filled the air with tobacco-smoke and covered the floor with tobacco-juice. Spittoons were as yet a luxury rarely found here.

AS the two entered, silence fell—hats came off, and fierce eyes focused admiringly; women were not rare in San Francisco, but they were by no means a drug on the market. A clerk hustled up, recognizing Dent, and escorted them through that heavy, pregnant silence to the office of the senior partner. Nahiena swept the throng with a smile, and a buzz of tongues arose as the door closed behind them.

Willock was a dry, precise little man with side-whiskers, a stovepipe hat reposing handily on his desk. Dent introduced him cheerfully.

"Miss Clum, this is Mr. Willock. I think it will relieve him vastly if you'll vouch for my integrity."

WILLOCK shook hands, bowed the lady to a chair and fumbled with his snuff-box.

"Sorry, Miss Clum, very sorry indeed; but in a matter of such importance I can speak only with principals. One cannot be too cautious here. The town is filled with sharpers of all kinds."

"Is my father really safe?" broke out the girl.

"Safe? Absolutely. You'll pardon me if I ask for some proof of your identity—"

This was speedily afforded, and Nahiena made clear that she desired Dent to remain, so the little agent had no further objections to voice; he relaxed and spoke without restraint.

"I have been exceedingly worried about your father, and am now in a position to report my findings," he said. "As you know, we handled all the papers regarding the sale of his properties, and the money was paid over. He took a sizable sum with him in cash, the remainder being very fortunately left in our charge."

He paused, took a pinch of snuff, and dusted his lapel.

"On the day after his visit," he resumed, "the English brig *Mortimer* left port, bound for the Sandwich Islands and Canton. Yesterday I talked at some length with her local agent, who was, if I may use the term, somewhat the worse for liquor." He coughed discreetly, and gave Dent the slightest suspicion of a wink. "He went into some detail as to how a crew had been secured for the brig."

"You mean my father shipped aboard her as captain?" broke out Nahiena. "But that's ridiculous! Even if he had wanted to ship aboard her, he would never have done so if she were going to the Sandwich Islands, never!"

Dent was surprised by this positive statement, and gave her a curious glance,

"Thirteen!" said a voice. "So you win on the emblem of bad luck! Decidedly, you are a man of destiny!"

but she was wholly absorbed in the agent. Mr. Willock coughed again.

"I did not say that he had shipped as master, Miss Clum. I did not say that he had actually shipped at all—"

"But he wouldn't have gone as passenger!" she interrupted.

"I agree with you, madam, but I am certain that he is now aboard that brig. I find that he dined with her master and one or two other gentlemen, late that night. As you know, he is of marked appearance; well, he was last seen in their company! Also, I find that a man answering his description, but very drunk, was shipped out with other men to the brig during the night. The conclusion is obvious. I regret to say that your father must have been shanghaied."

"But he could not be drunk!" protested the girl, wide-eyed. "He never drank at all!"

Willock shrugged lightly. "A man need not drink liquor to be drugged. He might have been knocked on the head, of course, and taken aboard. These things happen here daily; no man is safe, if he has money in his pocket." He warmed to the wide-eyed desolation of the girl's face. "Believe me, madam, a far worse fate might have befallen your father! As it is, he should be regarded as very lucky. Most of his money—or your money—is safe in our hands; he has suffered little injury, and he is certain to be set ashore at Honoruru."

"I hear the name has been changed to Honolulu," Dent interjected.

The words served as a check-valve to emotion, for he wanted to burst out laughing. The idea of Captain Ezra Clum, the very picture of a stiff, dignified hard-shell New England ship's-master, being shanghaied like one of the common

seamen he had so often commanded, was richly amusing to any sailor.

And yet behind all this lay a darker possibility. It was not likely that such a man had been shanghaied by sheer chance; it might have been done for his money, or for other reasons. According to Thady, he walked in some vague fear from out his past.

All this in a flash; Dent found swift warning in the white, set features of the girl. Her eyes were tragic, and he wondered that this information should hit her so hard. He went on speaking, quickly.

"Then he's in no danger; we should indeed regard him as lucky, Mr. Willock. This is why the hotels and the Marbleheaders could tell me nothing about him, eh?"

Willock nodded. "No doubt. Now, Miss Clum, you need have no worry about funds. The money deposited by your father is subject to withdrawal by him or by you—"

"I have plenty of cash," the girl broke in. "Never mind that. I must reach the islands at once and help him! Will this English brig certainly stop there?"

"Yes, to overhaul. Your father will go ashore there, beyond doubt."

Dent turned to her. "You don't need to help him, Nahiena; just settle down here to await his return. That's the wisest course."

"A lot you know about it!" Her dark eyes struck at him scornfully, impatient-

ly, then darted back to the agent. "How soon can I get to the islands myself?"

"A barque is lying off Clark's Point now," replied Willock. "The *Eliza* of New Bedford, sailing in a couple of days. She's taking supplies to the missionaries. Most of her crew skipped out, and she's trying to get a couple of mates and a dozen men before she sails. I know she needs a chief mate, at least."

"What wages?" demanded Dent.

"What she must pay. Ordinary seamen engaged here get a hundred and fifty per month; a mate in proportion, I've no doubt."

NAHIENA rose abruptly and extended her hand to the agent.

"Thank you, Mr. Willock. I'll be around in an hour or two with another draft for deposit; take care of all the funds, till you hear from us. —Ready, Abner?"

Surprised by her sudden leave-taking, Dent accompanied her from the building. In the street, she tugged at his arm and led him on toward the rising ground up the street, where the houses thinned out and the sandy trail led among ragged stumps over a hillside.

"Come on—I want to sit down here in the open air and think," she declared. "We can look at the bay; I want you to point out that barque, too."

Dent, striding along beside her, noted her intent and frowning face.

"What's upset you so? Your father's safe enough—"

"He's not. He's in terrible danger," she cut in. "You don't understand; I can't talk about it where anyone could overhear."

Dent held his peace. Past the last of the cabins, and on the rise beyond, she turned out of the trail and without ceremony sat down against a small stump.

"You must help," she announced. "Get out your pipe and be comfortable. Which of those ships is the one?"

This was a poser, for half a dozen craft lay off Clark's Point. He picked a barque at random to appease her interest, and she nodded.

"Very well. You must get me passage aboard her. Do you understand?"

"Sure. Might get myself the chief mate's berth, too. How'd you like that?"

"It would be wonderful," she said quietly. "I'd like to have you with me."

"Well, explain," he rejoined. "Your father; danger, and so forth. I just don't understand it."

She stared out at the water and the ships, and the far shores and hills beyond.

"All I know is that we could never go back to the Sandwich Islands, Abner. Why? I don't know. It would mean death. My mother said so. Especially for my father. Why? They never told me. But all my life I've been impressed by the fearful danger that would attend any visit to the islands by him. That's absolutely all I know. . . . Am I silly to worry about him, and to plan to reach and help him?"

Dent got his pipe alight, thoughtfully. Incomplete as it was, this information fitted in; some dark thing from the past had been riding the soul of Captain Ezra Clum. Something from twenty years ago, when he must have fled from the islands with a missionary's daughter. And no little thing, either!

"No, you're not silly," he said, puffing steadily. "But here's something to chew on; from what I've learned, the islands have changed tremendously in the past twenty years or so since your parents left. Now they're civilized, united under a strong, liberal king, and the people are largely Christian. A generation ago your father might have been in acute peril there, whereas now he'd be forgotten entirely."

"That's true," she said, and the strained look passed from her face, and she drew a deep breath. "Yes. I hadn't thought of that. All the same, I'm going. Are you in earnest about shipping on that barque?"

Dent shrugged. "I don't care particularly. I'd like to make sure you're all right. Why not? I can always come back here and have a fling; this town bewitches me. Things are so free and easy, so informal, so alive in every way! There's money to be made here, big money, fortunes! People here from all over the world. A sailor's life is a dog's life. I hate the very sight of the sea. Yes, I can always come back—"

His voice trailed off upon unuttered thoughts, half-sensed. She, watching the firm lines of his face now, smiled a little.

"Abner, you make me think of a boy who's just discovered all the wonderful things in the world!"

HE looked up, met her look, and broke into a laugh.

"Yes? That's about the way I do feel, sometimes, myself! I like things that are alive and going. Just as you are,

Nahiena. I can't get over how lovely you are, now that you've become yourself. Well, the morning's getting along!" He moved abruptly, knocked out his pipe, and came to his feet. "We'd better go back and see if Thady has shown up. What about him? You'll leave him here, of course?"

She took his hand and rose lithely.

"Thady? I don't know—he'll stay here, I suppose. But I must pay him what my father owes him, before we leave. Are you going out now to that barque?"

"No. We'd better return and get dinner, then I'll look around. Her captain should be ashore. I'll probably find him at Dixey's Restaurant; he'll be a New Bedford man, so the Marbleheaders will know something about him. Ready? Then come along."

As she took his arm, an exclamation escaped her. He looked down; her hand had touched what was left of the wooden hook.

"Oh, that's nothing!" he said, but his face darkened. "That scrimmage with the hotel fellow snapped it off. . . . It wasn't meant for rough work. I've another in my bag. And a light iron one, to use at sea and elsewhere."

"I'm sorry," she said gently, but her words did not banish the bitterness that had settled again in his eyes.

Chapter Four

ABNER DENT went about his affairs that afternoon briskly enough. Thady had not yet turned up, but he wasted little thought on the scarecrow actor.

Although the mystery of the vanished Cap'n Clum was dispelled, in its place had arisen other questions that vexed Dent. Since his meeting with Raousset, the name of Fairhaven had stuck in his mind; the Frenchman had promised to speak frankly, if Dent looked him up, and it was worth the doing.

"Not that it's any of my business," Dent told himself, "but I can't get rid of the notion that Clum wasn't shanghaied by chance. If not, then what? I'd like to know. It's a damned shame that Nahiena should be mixed up in what appears to be some kind of a sinister pursuit—or am I imagining things? She's far too good for this father of hers, that's certain!"

By good luck he encountered the master of the *Narwhal,* his late ship, refused a pressing offer to ship again for Canton and home, and was set upon the track of Captain Whidden of the *Eliza,* finding the latter in a shipping office. Whidden was a dour and bearded giant, a glum man of fifty with coldly humorless eyes, whose mind was set on cursing the gold-fever that had tied up his ship here.

MENTION of passage money softened him; he had a spare cabin and agreed to turn it over to Miss Clum. Dent paid down earnest money, and that was that. Whidden fairly jumped at the chance to get a chief mate as far as the islands, where he could easily procure someone to take Dent's place, and sourly agreed to pay the prevailing wages. Dent was to be aboard by the following evening, with the passenger and luggage; and thus the job was finished. Whidden refused a parting drink.

"I use no liquor," he declared; "and see ye come aboard sober, Mister! I've another passage bespoke for the islands, and a promise of the hands I need, and must see about it, so good day to you."

He clumped away toward the shacks and tents down the street. Dent, aware that a hard-mouthed master meant a shipshape barque, chuckled and sought out the lodgings of Count Raousset, only to find the Frenchman not there.

Meaning to have his fling at the tables, he turned in at the Lucky Chance, a gambling-hall that was crowded both day and night. He ordered a drink at the bar, took his time sipping it, and gave his attention to the scene before him. It was not an exciting scene. The bar was well filled. Men grouped about the tables were giving their whole attention to the play—bearded miners, Indianlike trappers, city men, vaqueros and Mexican dandies, a scattering of foreigners, here and there a professional gambler. Tobacco-smoke and harsh voices filled the air. About the edges of the groups, friends gossiped and watchers looked on. At the rear of the place, poker-games were silent and intent.

Money was everywhere. The scales and weigher were kept busy with pokes of dust and nuggets; gold and silver money of a dozen nations rolled on the green cloth. It was too early for hard drinking to have injected its note of roaring recklessness into the place. Gambling was a serious matter to most of those here. The atmosphere about them was one of tense, anxious suspense; now and then a bursting oath or a whoop

of exhilaration indicated the run of chance.

Dent finished his drink, made his way to the roulette-table, worked through to the edge of the board, and stood watching. He was no gambler. In one pocket he had a dozen coins, broad silver-pieces and a couple of gold, all South American money, to devote to the nimble goddess; if he lost, that ended it.

He began to play; he began to lose. One by one, his coins were raked across the cloth. He played haphazard, amused, interested, eager, yet not expecting to win. One of his gold-pieces was down; the ivory ball spun and whirled and stopped, and the gold was gone. Dent tossed out the other and left it where it fell, on the 13. The wheel spun; the ivory ball jumped and whirled and clicked home. Thirteen, and a handful of gold-pieces to match his own!

Dent laughed, raked them up, pocketed them, and turned away.

"Thirteen!" said a voice. "So you win on the emblem of bad luck, and stop! Decidedly, you are a man of destiny!"

He found himself face to face with Raousset, the Frenchman. Not the boatman now, but a man shaven and pomaded, fine linen sparkling, broadcloth finely cut; a dandy.

"Oh, hello!" Dent shook hands. "I was at your lodgings; found you gone."

"Then well met! You're not playing any more?"

Dent clapped hand to clinking pocket. "I'm rich, for me! I'm satisfied."

"I admire you. Come, a bottle of wine together."

THEY stood at the lower end of the bar, Dent refusing the wine in preference for rum. They sipped in leisurely fashion, unhurried, with no one near them; passing men exchanged nods with Raousset, who seemed well known. Dent again felt the man's charm, his powerful personality, his intelligence. Dent mentioned the new emperor who had seized power in France, and Raousset burst out:

"Ah! These French soldiers—they are brave, dashing, brilliant! But not steady or thorough. They will win, under this new Napoleon, as long as they meet only less able armies; when they meet one that is more able, they will crumple."

"You say such things about your own people?"

"I was one of them, on the staff; I learned my lesson," said Raousset. "And no one is going to dictate to me. When I make my bid for fame and power, I shall do it in my own way! Once more, I invite you to share the future with me; you are truly a man of destiny, you win on the thirteen—ha! To the future!"

Dent drank, and smiled. "Sorry, Count! But Mexico doesn't tempt me. Oh, it's no secret," he added, at the other's look of surprise. "Everyone seems to know it."

RAOUSSET broke into a laugh. "Yes, I suppose so; they do not know my methods or my real aim, however. No one shall know that! Would it astonish you to hear that when I succeed, I shall have the full backing of France?"

Dent leaned on the bar, steadied his pipe with his broken hook, and filled it.

"Nothing would astonish me, I reckon," he said slowly. "Especially in San Francisco."

"You are right. Look!" Raousset, turning, stabbed with his finger at various parts of the hall. "There at the faro-table, behind the dealer—that man is from Peru. He was once a general. He is a descendant of the Incas. That tall, bearded man watching the dice-game—he is an Austrian noble of the highest rank, one of the Hapsburgs. Come down the street and I can show you a Russian bound for the diggings; he is an exile, a cousin of the Czar. No one knows or cares, here. But I know these things!"

"Bet you don't know who I am—what I am, really," said Dent. The other turned and met his serious, composed gaze with startled surmise.

"Eh? You are some exceptional man, I know—but what, then?"

"A Yankee," said Dent. "A Marble-header. That means a hell of a lot, Count. I'm not in for any wild-goose chase after empire or gold. I earn my money; I don't like to get it for nothing, either by gambling or soldiering or grabbing. You folks from Europe think you can get gold for nothing; you can't. It costs like hell, one way or another. Me, I'm sailing tomorrow or next day for the Sandwich Islands. I like you fine, but I don't fancy any Mexico scheme."

Raousset chuckled, and his chuckle developed into a hearty burst of laughter.

"Yankee! Yes, you're right," he said at last, still shaken by mirth. "I love your frank speech; we might become friends, with time. The Sandwich Islands, eh? I should have known it. I said you were a man of destiny."

"If a man dropped a thousand dollars in gold into your hand, would you refuse it?"

"Eh?" Dent, holding a match to his pipe, frowned. "What d'ye mean?"

"I hoped to see a man; he is not here." Raousset's sparkling eyes roved about the place. "An English aristocrat, a nobleman; you should know him. He is, as it happens, also an agent of France. This new empire of France, *mon ami,* is going to spread far and wide across the earth! Things are stirring, things are afoot, in Mexico and elsewhere. The flag of our Napoleon, I tell you, will soon be flying in unexpected places!"

"WHAT are you hinting at?" demanded Dent.

"It's not my secret; it's not for me to say. But you're bound for the Sandwich Islands? A man of destiny if ever there was one! If a man dropped a thousand dollars in gold into your hand, would you refuse it?"

"Not likely." Dent chuckled. "Not likely it'd be dropped, either."

"Wait and see! I know this Englishman, this Sir Francis. You'll hear from him. Why? Because his destiny may lie with yours. And because I like you; we are friends. Health!"

Dent drank, and nodded shrewdly.

"All right, and I thank you, Count. But meaning no offense, I've met nobility here and there, and most always there's a screw loose. You're all right. I'd gamble with you in a minute, if you were going my way; but most of them bear watching. Close watching."

Again Raousset blew into a gale of laughter, vastly amused.

"My friend, I love you because you speak the truth! It is a great pity you will not go to Mexico. Will nothing tempt you?"

"No," said Dent. The other shrugged, emptied his glass, and extended his hand.

"Then, luck go with you, and I'll do my best to send it your way!"

Abner Dent walked back to his hotel, thoughtfully. The glamour of Raousset's proposals fed upon the man's understatement; fame and power—that was all he had admitted as his aim. There was a man to leave his name carved somewhere on the world!

All this sprawling, fire-scarred town was glamorous. Gold and nuggets; ships and men from far seas and farther lands; ambition flaming on all sides, good or evil alike—Lord! Was ever such a world-rush of men seeking? Glamorous women, too, flocking in to further their own ends; Dent was well aware of them, even if he shunned them.

"And me passing it all by for monthly wages and a sure footing," he reflected. "Not so sure, either—seeing a young woman safe back to her father, a girl who'd never look twice at a crippled man! Well, I'll go there and back, and if I find Raousset again, he might tempt me. A thousand dollars in my fist, and an English nobleman! Not so certain about that, either. I don't like English and I don't like nobility; no trusting 'em."

Youth tugged against caution in his brain, but caution was inbred and hard to budge.

He came toward the hotel. There was the nub of it, he admitted to himself rather grudgingly. He would not be

shipping off to the islands on the morrow, except for Nahiena. He did not give a hang for Cap'n Ezra Clum. It was this girl's charm, her vivacity, her proud quick spirit, she herself, in sum, that had bewitched him. She set store by him, she trusted him. She was perfectly able to get along by herself, she was in no danger whatever, yet she relied on him and he responded to it.

"Queer thing!" he thought, as he stepped into the hotel. "I should ha' let her go by herself, most like. Yet there's something back of it all I don't fathom; her father and the rest of it. Him being in danger yonder . . . and why was he shanghaied? I expect I'm just plumb curious."

Inside the entrance, he stopped short for a moment. Seated in big chairs at one side of the lobby, talking earnestly, were two men. One was Captain Whidden of the *Eliza,* chin-whiskers and all, who nodded greeting and recognition, then ignored him.

The other man was much younger than Whidden; his garments were the loveliest that ever Dent had seen. Glossy stovepipe hat, tailored broadcloth clothes, sparkling linen and polished boots; to complete this ensemble, about his shoulders was a magnificent Cashmere shawl of black-and-colors. Across his knees lay a malacca cane, something to think twice about in San Francisco. It was a stout and shiny cane.

"Something wrong with a man who has to depend on all that finery," sniffed Dent to himself. Upon the very thought, he knew himself unjust; the man's face struck at him and wiped aside all other considerations.

THIS was a man who did things! Bronzed deeply, with powerful square shoulders below and crisp reddish curls above, that lean and clean-shaven face caught the eye instantly. It was strongly chiseled, with a square, snapping, south-of-England jaw and thin lips; yet it was alert and vigorous, radiant with laughter, and so brightly alive were the blue eyes that they conveyed something like a shock when they landed.

"By heaven, there's a man to tie to!" thought Dent, as he went his way.

He first went to his own room, where he dug into his duffle-bag and got what he lacked. Removing his coat, he unstrapped from his left wrist the leather harness that held the broken hook. This he replaced with another, which buckled farther up his arm and carried a very strong but light steel hook; this served for heavy duty in general.

HE walked down the hall. To his knock, Nahiena opened her door.

"Oh! I'm glad you've come!" she exclaimed. "Thady's been found!"

"Showed up, did he?"

"Yes. The other hotel sent word he was there." Her face was twisted with concern. "But he—he's terribly drunk. It's frightful, Abner! I feel somehow responsible for him. He had no money, though Father owed him several hundred dollars. I can't leave here without paying him. Yet if I do, he'll lose it right off, or drink it away."

"That's his lookout," Dent said indifferently. "We can't be loaded down with a drunken sot. He may have his points, but the quicker we cast off, the better."

She studied him for a moment.

"You surely can't mean those harsh words, Abner."

He stared at her for a moment.

"Be sensible. Jettison all sentiment, and use common sense," he rejoined. "What's this man to you? Nothing. Pay him what you owe him, or leave the money with that other hotel, and be rid of him. He's no good. He's incompetent, and that's the worst of all crimes in a man's world like this."

A spark kindled in her dark eyes; a flush grew in her cheeks.

"I'm not a man, thank God! Abner, I want you to help me."

"How?" snapped Dent. "Surely you don't want to take him to the islands?"

"Not necessarily. At the camp, I kept him from drinking; so did Father. If he hadn't parted from us, I'd have kept him from liquor here. It might not be a bad idea at all if we could take him. You really have no idea of his capabilities, Abner." She was losing her anger, now. "What I really want, is just to make sure that his money is safe and that he'll be in a position to use it wisely."

Dent broke into a laugh. "So you want the impossible, do you? Just like a woman, every time! Now, hold on," he added, aware of the danger signals in her face. "If I guarantee that his money's safe, and that he'll not take a drink for the next two or three weeks—will that suit you?"

"Abner!" She came quickly to him, catching his arm, melting in a sudden warmth of emotion and delight. "I knew you were just pretending to be harsh—"

"Pretending, hell!" Dent escaped from her grasp, caught up his hat, and turned to the door. "Excuse me, miss; I spoke before I thought. No, I wasn't pretending. But if that's what you want, then you'll get it."

And he strode out, leaving her to stare after him in blank bewilderment.

When he returned, the afternoon was nearly gone. He knocked, entered at her call, and swung off his hat. He was grinning now, flushed and eager and boyish, an impish merriment dancing in his dark eyes.

"Well, Nahiena, it's done!" he announced. "Your friend Thady is taken care of, and I hope you're satisfied."

She regarded him half suspiciously. "What do you mean? What have you done about him? You didn't take the money, and I want to pay him."

"You can pay him at Honolulu."

"Honoruru?" She frowned. He noted absently that she used the old-fashioned pronunciation. "How can I pay him there?"

"Because he's aboard the *Eliza,* signed on for the voyage there! And now will you come out for a walk and a look at the town, and we'll go to Delmonico's board shack for supper."

He was glad of the way her first anger melted into laughter when she realized that after all, what was done would be for Thady's good.

He did not mention to her, however, that Thady had been brought back to his hotel and left there, dead drunk, by a man named Fairhaven—who could be no other, of course, than the Frank Fairhaven previously mentioned by Raousset and Thady himself.

He had come to have a dark though unfounded suspicion as to how and why Captain Ezra Clum had been shanghaied. What he now wanted to do, was prove it.

Chapter Five

DELMONICO'S, halfway down the hill to Clark's Point, was built of boards and canvas, and made no pretense at style or fancy cooking; but its fare was plentiful and good. Dent was prodigal of his new-won gold; the Chilean waiter was rhapsodic at hearing Nahiena speak his tongue; and the dinner was a decided success despite the crowd that filled the ramshackle place with a babble of tongues, and the flickering makeshift lamps.

Dent was in the act of paying the bill when a figure loomed at his elbow. He looked up; it was the same handsomely dressed man whom he had seen in the hotel with Whidden, shawl and all. The bold, striking blue eyes were fastened on Nahiena. The man was removing his glossy stovepipe hat and bowing.

"I cannot be mistaken!" he said in a rich but controlled voice. "Surely this is Mistress Clum? And Mr. Abner Dent of Marblehead?"

Dent rose, in astonishment. "Well, sir? You have the advantage of us."

"To my sorrow, sir! But allow me to repair the fault. My name is Francis Fairhaven. I hear you've been seeking news of Captain Ezra Clum; I can relieve your minds on that subject, if you'll permit me to do so."

FRANK FAIRHAVEN!

Dent could only stare, at a loss for words, not knowing what to think. This man, the scoundrel of Thady's forebodings? But Nahiena, in swift eagerness, welcomed Fairhaven, urged him to sit down, gave him breathless attention.

Dent dropped into his chair again, bewildered and suspicious—he was "caught full aback and broached-to," as he would have termed it.

"My friend Count Raousset spoke to me of you." Fairhaven turned to him with genial cordiality. "I am very fortunate to find you, Mr. Dent. However, let us first speak of Captain Clum. Let me say frankly, mademoiselle,"—and now Nahiena became his objective—"that your father and I have not been entirely friends; that is, we have differed in business deals. At the same time, I have ever held him in great respect."

Dent scarcely heard the words; fresh realization smote him at the name of Raousset.

This was Sir Francis, of course! The same whom Raousset had mentioned, some sort of French agent! He swallowed hard, composed himself, forced down his amazement and accepted the cigar Sir Francis handed him. With permission from Nahiena, the Havanas were soon alight.

The slight touch of formality which at first marked Sir Francis, quickly fled. Almost at once the three were upon an intimate basis; he was one of those men who sweep aside all barriers of convention, in their eager zest of life. His charm could not be denied. To his very fingertips, he was a fine gentleman. His swift

"I cannot be mistaken! Surely this is Mistress Clum? . . . My name is Francis Fairhaven."

admiration of Nahiena was obvious and yet discreetly flattering.

Before Dent could collect his thoughts, he found his suspicions attacked and swept away. Thady? Why, certainly! Sir Francis had encountered the man much the worse for liquor and had taken him to his hotel and left him; frankly said, frankly done. Captain Whidden?

"He spoke of you both this morning," said Sir Francis with beaming delight. "We must be friends; we must! We're to be shipmates, you know. I'm sailing tomorrow for the Sandwich Islands. I have friends there, and business activities."

"You're a Britisher?" spoke up Dent. "Sir Francis—is that it?"

"Ha! Raousset told you I had a title, eh?" The other laughed heartily. "Nonsense! Inherited, not earned. Yes, I started life in the British navy, but soon left it. Other interests took hold of me. I've captained ships from China, have wandered about the gold-fields, have turned a penny here and a pound there—how the islands beckon once more."

"But my father?" put in the girl.

Fairhaven started.

"Oh! Your pardon," he said contritely. "Yes. I've learned that your father was forced aboard a ship that sailed for the islands last week. I ran down the blackguardly crimp who shanghaied him, and put the fear of God into the scoundrel. He even turned over to me your father's money-belt—with the contents, I believe, intact. I left the belt for you at your hotel, madam, a half-hour ago. There's nothing further to be done about it; to try and punish the rascal, would be vain. He assured me that your father had not been harmed, had merely been drugged and set aboard the vessel. You'll find him safe and well at the islands."

NAHIENA was starry-eyed in gratitude and warm appreciation. Abner Dent warily kept his thoughts to himself; he was studying this man. A thousand dollars dropped into his palm, eh? And for what? Some big venture afoot, if Raousset were to be credited.

Grudgingly, Dent found himself warming, losing his instinctive hostility. Britisher and aristocrat this man might be; but behind his charm, behind his radiant personality and his splendid gusto, one divined not only superb assurance but

downright efficiency and steely will-power. Despite the gay shawl and the fine clothes, Fairhaven's hands were hard, calloused, strong. Despite his cultured speech, which had almost no English accent, now and again slipped out seafaring words and phrases, or turns of speech wholly American. And Dent had the New England regard for efficiency in a man.

Shrewdly he ticketed the subject. A long time out of the navy; yet the man could not yet be thirty. Probably kicked out as a young fellow—ten years out, knocking about the Pacific, climbing here and there. A hard, ruthless man if crossed; a good friend if favored. Few or no scruples when it came to getting his way. And able, damned able! Inherited his title—for Dent never doubted the fact of it—but probably could not go back to England to take advantage of it. Such men were all too common.

Clum's money-belt regained, returned intact! Dent screwed up his mind, as it were, to survey the worst possibilities. If this man had caused Clum to be shanghaied, taking the belt and money himself, why return it? Because he had heard of the search for Clum? Not at all likely. Because he wanted to ingratiate himself, perhaps? Possibly, but still not likely. . . .

"Damn it, I'll have to believe him!" said Dent. The others looked suddenly at him, and he realized that he had spoken the words aloud.

Sir Francis, meeting his eyes, vented a sudden laugh of comprehension.

"Hello, hello! Suspecting me, were you?"

"Yes," Dent replied. "I did suspect you of having him shanghaied. Before I met you."

"Thanks." The blue eyes danced gayly. "A man who speaks his mind, eh? Good for you. I want a few words in private with you, Mr. Dent. Since Miss Clum wants to return to her hotel, suppose we see her there and then have a chat."

"As you like," said Dent. "I've nothing that demands privacy."

"But I have, and most devilishly so!" Sir Francis rose, with his frank, breezy laugh.

They walked up the hill to the hotel. Sir Francis gained in favor; he made no effort to monopolize Nahiena, but treated her like a great lady, gave Dent a cheery camaraderie, blew kisses to the stars and talked of the warm timeless islands, so different from this land of chill and mist. A man capable, vigorous, friendly.

And yet—and yet, five words lingered at the back of Dent's head. *"I've captained ships from China."* They were not sinister, but something lent them a sinister flavor. Something he had heard, gossip of the Seven Seas—what was it? He could not say. Those five words, for no reason he could put a finger on, struggled up to the surface and swam like a warning buoy in shoal water: *"I've captained ships from China."*

Nahiena had made many purchases this day; she had packing to do, she wanted to get a good night's sleep—her last on land for a bit. She was glad to be left alone and said so, and Dent did not miss the look she gave Sir Francis with her hand, at parting; it was a look of warmth and friendliness and gladness. She gave Dent a longer and a deeper look, and a more intimate word; but he missed this entirely.

Captain Clum's money-belt had been turned over to her, intact.

"Do you want to come to my room and talk?" Dent asked the Britisher, when she left them.

"No. I'd like you to come with me, if you don't mind, to my lodgings." Sir Francis took his arm and lowered his voice confidentially. "I must talk where it's safe; I distrust these flimsy hotel rooms. And I'd like to show you certain documents—that is, if we come to an agreement. Does the glitter of gold across the horizon tempt you, Dent?"

"Not a damned bit," Dent replied calmly. "Only if it's in my fist."

The other burst into a laugh, and they started off into the night.

"But horizon gold tempts *me*," said Sir Francis cheerfully, "because I'm a soldier of fortune, my friend. Like Raousset—like a hundred, a thousand, here around us. An able one, if I do say it. I don't fail in what I attempt."

"I can believe that," said Dent.

"And this time, by heaven, it's a play for a throne!" murmured Sir Francis almost as though talking to himself. After this, they went on in silence.

For a throne? That was nonsense, Dent reflected. Grandiloquent talk, and no more, doubtless.

THE lower streets of the town were savage—drunken song rose here and there, drunken brawls somewhere else, the shrilly cruel laughter of a woman,

the sharp staccato scream of a man—all were mere sounds in the darkness.

Sir Francis halted, at length, before a sturdy board shack, larger than most, and rapped on the door with an imperative fist. Three knocks, then two; evidently a signal.

The door swung wide. Dent followed his guide into a room, dimly lit from a fire-flicker in one corner. A little triangular fireplace was there, waist-high, Mexican style. The door was closed and barred; a woman's liquid voice said something, and Sir Francis replied, then touched Dent's arm.

"Here's a stool; wait until I get the lights going in my room behind. Smoke, if you like. Pay no attention to Keave; she speaks nothing but Kanaka."

A door in the rear wall opened and closed behind him.

DENT pulled up the stool and looked around. The woman was crouching or sitting by the fireplace; as his eyes grew accustomed to the dimly lit place, objects took shape. The woman, he saw, was an old hag, brown of skin and queerly attired.

A Kanaka, eh? Her name was Keave, Sir Francis had said; of course she was from the islands. What was an old island woman doing here?

Keave reached up and tossed something on the faintly flickering fire. The sweetish perfume of sandalwood filled the air; in a moment it seemed to permeate the whole room. Dent felt it tingling in his lungs, in his brain. Another odor mingled with it, and reminded him of a sight-seeing trip he had made in Canton—opium, of course! He cursed under his breath, for his head was whirling. What the devil was Sir Francis about, anyway? Why didn't he come along?

Abner Dent half rose from his stool, with an impulse to get out of here at all hazards; the impulse died, and he sank back in a dizzy whirl.

The old woman was muttering or singing in a cracked voice; suddenly she uttered a sharp call:

"Nahiena! Nahiena!"

Something stirred; Dent looked around, and his jaw fell. On the floor close by were bones, human bones. A skull, a femur, vertebræ—and they were moving. Untouched, beyond the hag's reach, the bones were moving! He heard the rattle as they moved. A spasm of fright and horror gripped him.

The old woman sprang up. There was a swish; she flung something over those moving bones, and Dent stared at it in stupefaction. He knew what it was, for he had seen one of these things in the islands. It was a cloak or mantle made of feathers, but not the usual feathers. These were all of a brilliant golden yellow, whose use was limited to the royal family alone. Only those of the blood of Tamehameha the Great were allowed to wear yellow.

"Nahiena!" said the old hag again, and resumed her crouching position beside the fireplace.

Dent stared at the yellow robe. It was moving; the bones were moving under it. At least, something moved there, for the yellow feathers rippled and stirred, until the entire covering was in motion. Dent could not take his gaze from it. His brain felt frozen.

"Nahiena!" came the hag's voice. *"Aroha nui! Aroha nui roa!"*

The mantle was flung away. From the bones on the floor rose a slim, lovely shape—a girl, wearing only garlands of flowers. Smiling, she came to Dent and touched his hand. She was brown, not white like the real Nahiena; a golden, glowing brown. Yet she was real; Dent could feel her body against him, her fingers on his hand. He could smell the perfume of the flower garlands.

With a shudder, an instinctive recoil of terror, he shoved her away. To his amazement, since he had used no force, she fell prostrate, caught at the yellow robe, drew it over herself. The old hag leaped up and came to her. Dent saw the glitter of a knife in the faintly flickering firelight.

A hideous laugh escaped the hag. She darted back and crouched again by the fireplace. She was holding something that dripped blood; Dent could see the scarlet drops. It was a slim bronze hand, severed at the wrist. . . .

The spell broke. One wild oath of fury and fright burst from Dent as he came to his feet and kicked the yellow robe aside. Nothing was under it, except white bones; another oath, and he swung toward the old hag.

A GLOW of light came into the room as the rear door was flung open. Sir Francis stood there, his voice ringing cheerily:

"All right, Dent! Sorry to have kept you waiting! Come along—we'll have a drink to warm us up a bit."

Dent complied, mechanically. The door closed behind him, and that room of horror was shut out like an evil dream. A whale-oil lamp shed brilliant light on a table, on books, on bottles, and glasses and pipes and tobacco. With a broken sigh, Dent sank into a chair.

SIR FRANCIS, coming around the table, caught sight of his face and stopped short.

"Hello! What the devil!"

Dent grimaced and pulled himself together.

"Your friend, out there—"

"Oh, Keave was up to her tricks, was she? The old witch!" A chair scraped. With a laugh, Sir Francis settled himself, and poured whisky into glasses. "Here, have a drink and forget it. Yes, Keave was some sort of a sorceress, a priestess of the former gods, I understand. She comes from the island of Maui, and speaks the old dialect. That's all been changed now. Tamehameha has become Kamehameha, *aroha* has become *aloha,* and so forth. Well, here's luck today and the devil take tomorrow!"

The liquor was good; it warmed the heart and steadied the brain. Dent was himself again; he filled a pipe with steady fingers, balancing the bowl with his iron hook. Yet the sense of crawling horror still quivered within him.

Sir Francis filled a pipe also, lit it over the lamp, and leaned back in his chair, his quick blue eyes gripping Dent.

After a moment of silence, he began to speak slowly.

"Master Dent, my friend Raousset says you're a man of destiny; I can well believe it. I offer you a large share in a venture that will make your fortune in every sense of the word. The venture is honorable. It demands courage, mastery, swift action. You have these qualities. The offer is a thousand dollars, or the equivalent, now; five thousand more on the day of success six weeks hence. After that, as much fortune as you want to grasp."

As he spoke, Sir Francis opened a leather pouch that stood at his elbow, and emptied it across the table. A rolling flood of gold-pieces escaped and clinked and lay glittering.

Dent glanced at them, then met the blue eyes again. His voice was level as he asked:

"Eh? What makes my services worth so much to you?"

"Not only to me, but to those I represent," came the smiling and cheerful response. "The pay is small, compared to what you can do for us. I don't choose to explain everything at the moment; not until you agree to join me. But you're in a position to give full value, I assure you! Are you interested?"

"Yes," said Dent, a glow and a hot pulse-beat coming into his veins. "Lord, yes! But I'm going to the islands, understand. I must help Miss Clum find her father."

Sir Francis broke into a gale of laughter, and Dent's brows drew down again.

"What's so damned funny about that?"

"It's amusing. Why not?" Sir Francis leaned forward, his eyes twinkling. "Don't worry about Captain Clum; we'll find him safe enough when we get to the islands, Dent. He'll be in good hands. I've taken care of that."

"You have?"

"Why, yes." The other laughed again, and drew at his pipe. "You see, I had him taken off; naturally, I didn't want to tell her so, offhand. But I had him shanghaied. We'll find him awaiting us, never fear."

Dent shook his head. He looked at the gold-pieces, touched them, noted idly that they were French money.

"His daughter won't like that when she discovers it," he said slowly. Across his brain the words of Thady were pulsing: *"A scoundrel, a rascal, a seaman like yourself!*

"You mean Nahiena? Nonsense!" Sir Francis, unsmiling now, was grave and intent; his voice rasped with sudden unleashed energy. "I'll prove myself the best friend that young woman ever had—and so shall you, I promise you! Her welfare is your interest, and it is mine as well."

MEETING his gaze, eye to eye, young Abner Dent for the first time realized how cold and merciless and masterful could be those blue eyes, with their heavy lids slanted downward at the corners.

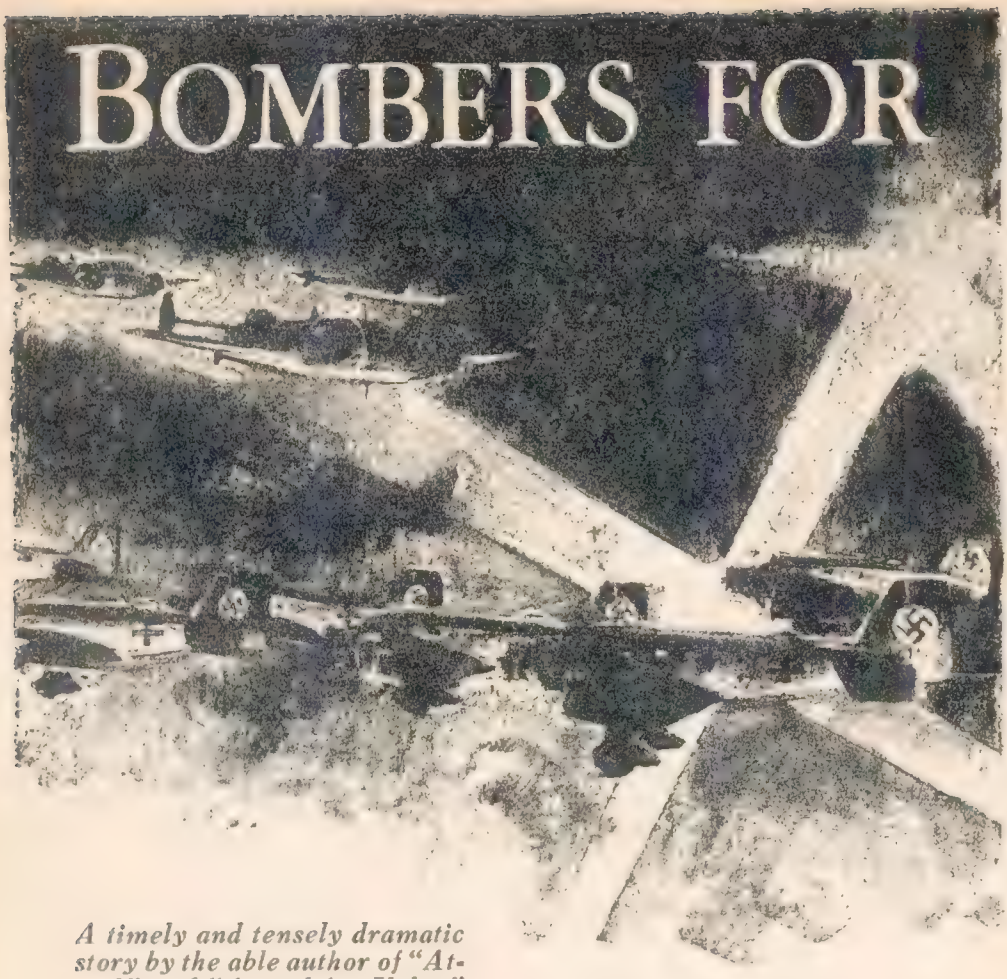
"Yes?" he inquired steadily. "And what's your interest in Cap'n Ezra Clum's daughter?"

The laughter had all gone out of Sir Francis' voice. His tone was steely:

"She doesn't know it yet, but she's not his daughter. She's no more related to him than you are. Her father, Mr. Dent, was a king."

This novel of wild days in California and Hawaii continues in our November issue.

BOMBERS FOR



A timely and tensely dramatic story by the able author of "Attack" and "Award for Valor."

By LELAND JAMIESON

STANDING rigid and angry in the office of the commandant of the Newfoundland Airport, Squadron Leader George Burnham—twenty years a commercial pilot on a freight run in the bush, but now again, as from 1916 to 1918, an officer of the Royal Canadian Air Force—banged his square fist on Air Commander Leslie Manders' desk, and, his big mouth snapping like a belligerent turtle's, exploded:

"What in hell do you think I came out of the bush for, except to fight the Boches again? They can't do this to me! Who signed that message?"

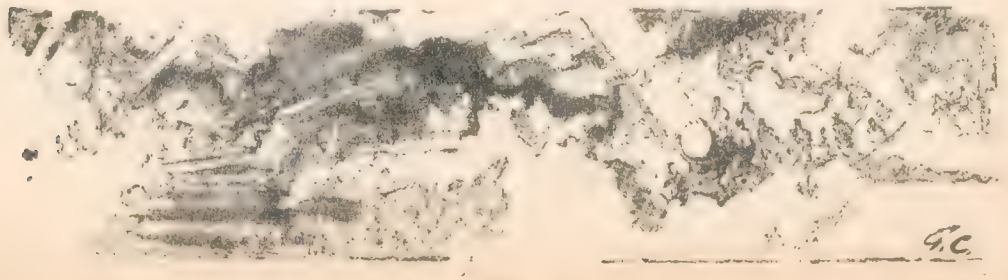
"Keep your pants on," Leslie Manders grinned. He was tall and wiry, with thin dark hair and a lean, expressive face. For eighteen months, during the last war, he had been George Burnham's observer in France; later, he had remained in the RCAF, while Burnham had gone into the bush, so in recent years they had lost contact completely. But that made no difference now; they were still friends, with between them the bond known only

by men who have fought for each other under enemy fire. "The message came in this morning, George, after you'd taken off from Trenton. It was signed by Air Vice-Marshal Bainbridge, Chief of the Air Staff. I'm sorry, old man, but—"

"A fine thing!" George Burnham said bitterly, and turned with an angry agility and sat down in the chair beside Manders' desk. He was a short, solidly-built man with a leathery face and puckered blue eyes; his age was about forty-five, although the tough, athletic quality of his physique made him look younger. "Why did they change my orders? That's what I want to know—why?"

"Because it's only good sense, after all," Manders said reasonably. "They never should have planned anything else. Your experience is too valuable to risk. And besides, just like myself, you're too old—you're old enough to be cautious."

"There're times when a pilot should be cautious, even in war," George Burnham retorted. "But I can still fight! All I want is the chance to show I can fight!"



"The trouble is, George," Manders declared, "you and I would be cautious at the wrong times, probably. The kids who fight air-battles today have got to jump in and let the devil claw down the hindmost. You know that."

"Of course I know it," Burnham said angrily. "But—" He broke off, swearing fluently.

"So we don't fight, in this war—we teach others to fight," Manders said. "Our day is gone, George, and we've got to recognize that. I'd give my right eye to get over there, just as you would, but I can't. I'm stuck here."

With a frustrated gesture, Squadron Leader Burnham crunched out his cigarette and stared moodily out through the window.

From this headquarters office in the administration building, he could see the full sweep of Newfoundland Airport, known among pilots as "Botwood," although Botwood was only its seaport, twenty-nine miles to the northwest by air and seventy-six miles by rail.

THE field had been intended as the western terminus for trans-Atlantic commercial service, but with the war and the driving haste needed to stop the continuing Nazi thrusts, all thought of commercial operations had long since been forgotten, and it was now the jumping-off place for American-built bombers that were being hurried east to reinforce Britain.

A long row of those bombers were on the "line" now—the squadron which Burnham had led in this afternoon from Trenton, Ontario. One of them was up on a test flight at this moment, wheeling swiftly over Gandor Lake to the south. Tomorrow that plane, and the others, would lift from this field and head eastward across the blank North Atlantic. Fearing the worst, Burnham looked back at Manders and said:

"Do I get to go on across, or do I have to give up my squadron here?"

"You're to take your squadron over, as planned," Manders said. "But you'll return at once to Trenton and begin training new pilots."

Squadron Leader Burnham nodded, and sat there staring bitterly out the window. The idea of going back to the RCAF advanced flying-school at Trenton, Ontario, of spending the rest of the war instructing, a cog in the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, filled him with a dull kind of hopelessness. He hated instructing. For eight months, all through a long winter and spring, he had been instructing this squadron at Trenton.

He hadn't hated that, but only because he had felt he was building an aviation unit, training men whom he would eventually lead into battle; and there was a vast difference between that, and performing the boring rote and rule of a regular flying-instructor. These men were his "boys." He had taught them every trick in his book, because each was his personal friend, and he had known how good each must be when the guns started going. For eight months he had pumped knowledge and skill into them, driving it in and flying it in, so that they would have a chance to survive.

And they were good; they were the best squadron he had ever seen—clear-eyed; quietly determined and confident young men, afraid of nothing. They would account for themselves in this war, and many of them would live through it, because of what George Burnham had taught them—he, who had lived through the last war, and therefore knew what it took to survive.

It was odd, he thought, sitting mute there in his chair now, how deep his affection for them was; how intense his desire to be up there with them, leading them through the bursts of shells and the stinging paths of steel bullets. He thought he could lead them and keep them out of harm's way, as much as could be possible in a war so bitter and relentless and vengeful as this one. The idea of their going out on a life-or-death mission without him made him feel actually sick with a strange kind of fright. It was, he thought suddenly, almost like having a son and seeing him march into battle alone with only his gun and his faith in God to protect him. It wrenched his heart to think of it that way.

For George Burnham had no son, nor family ties of any kind; he had only these boys to whom he had become attached with a profound affection, the depth of which he had not even suspected until now.

BUT orders from the Air Vice-Marshal demanded obedience. Feeling forlorn and lonely in a way he never had before, Burnham looked across the desk into Leslie Manders' lean face.

"All right," he said heavily, "when do we leave?"

"You'll take off tomorrow afternoon at two o'clock," Manders said. "You'll lead

your squadron to the bombardment group airport at Kent. When—"

"Afternoon departure—that's going to put us into Foynes long after dark, and—"

"You won't go into Foynes," Manders interrupted. "With the Irish situation what it is, there's too much chance of sabotage. You'll jump straight through to Kent, and catch a boat out of Liverpool the next morning to come back."

"But these bombers won't make it!" Burnham protested. "That's twenty-three hundred—"

There was a grim expression on the air commander's thin mouth. "They'll make it, with a reduced crew and reduced armament. You'll have only a navigator-gunner in each ship, besides the pilot. You'll have only one light machine-gun per plane. That's why you're going at night. The Germans couldn't possibly intercept you over England at night."

"Is the situation that bad?" Burnham demanded, and he felt strangely shocked at the thought.

"The situation's that bad," Manders said quietly.

IT was one-thirty; in thirty minutes it would be time to take off. Standing with his pilots in the meteorological office, Squadron Leader Burnham was analyzing the North Atlantic weather map for them. It was beautifully clear summer weather here; it was almost always good weather at Botwood, except for occasional heavy rains and blinding winter snows; but the east coast of Newfoundland, as well as the North Atlantic, was infamous for fog.

"We'll probably hit fog, before we're across," Burnham said. "I'll stay on top if that's possible. We'll ride the beam as long as we can pick it up. However, each plane's navigator must keep a running fix by taking a sun-sight every thirty minutes. It's possible that we may become separated, if the weather gets too bad—I want each of you to go through without getting lost and cracking up." He looked from one face to another, appraising these men. "We can't afford to lose ships now!"

Some of them grinned; they all looked superbly confident. It had constantly amazed him how cocky and sure of themselves they were. Even from the beginning, there had not been a weak one among them, which was unusual, for there were nearly always weak ones in any group this large. This was the finest squadron he had ever seen. Their morale

"They can't do this to me! Who signed that message?"

was excellent, and they were fretting to get across and have a go at the Germans; even the prospect of the North Atlantic flight did not worry them. They stood straight and military in their heavy flying-suits, their young faces intent as they listened to what he was saying.

"Are there questions?" he asked.

Flight Leader Dirkins, the dark-eyed, hawk-nosed second-in-command, said evenly, "Only one thing: We just got these American ships. We've heard wonderful things about their engines—but will they really carry on indefinitely, if one engine quits?"

"Ordinarily," Burnham assured him. "But there's not a chance in a thousand

that even one engine will quit. I wouldn't worry about that, John."

"I'm not worried—I'm just asking," Dirkins said. "I'm not worried at all." He didn't look worried.

Flight Officer Leonard, the cockiest of them all, an ebullient, pugnacious young man, exclaimed, "What's got me worried is how soon we'll be able to get into action, once we're across." He grinned at George Burnham. "We're counting on you leading us into a good scrap the first thing!"

"Right-o," Burnham said quickly, and the word seemed to stick in his throat. He hadn't told them, yet, that he wouldn't be able to lead them, when they made their first flight over the enemy. Last night he had tried, while they all sat in one end of their barracks and talked of the war. He had tried—and anger and emotion and an inner rebellion had choked his words down. He had decided to wait until they were across, when there would be time for sentimentalities.

"TONIGHT, as we near Ireland," he said gruffly, "we'll be under an overcast. When we hit rain or any sort of reduced visibility, close up your intervals quickly, just as I've taught you. We'll leave our running-lights on, over Ireland and England, or some jittery anti-aircraft gun-crew may think we're Germans and take some pot-shots at us."

The young men laughed recklessly. Somebody said, "Let them have their fun. They can't hit anything! What I'm worried about is what I should do if not one, but both my engines stop."

"You might try swimming," someone else said.

They filed out to their planes—the long line of planes that stood on the run-up ramp, each with a machine-gun muzzle thrusting bluntly from the bombardier's tourelle. The gunner-navigators—one to each plane—waited in a cluster on the ramp, talking with airport mechanics. Without exception they were young men too, just finished with their schooling in the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan; there were Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders; their faces were eager and excited at the prospect of what was ahead of them.

Squadron Leader Burnham shook hands all around, smiling. "The Atlantic shouldn't bother us," he said. "Let's go." With shouted farewells and exhortations of good luck, the group dispersed, a pilot and gunner walking briskly to each plane.

In the cockpit of his own ship, George Burnham checked everything with care. He cranked his engines and listened critically as he revved them up, and taxied out, seeing the others moving into place behind him. He swung into the fresh southwest wind and gunned into his take-off. Even with its tremendous load of fuel, the plane accelerated with astonishing rapidity. The broad, long runway with its embedded flush-type lights became apparently fluid underneath the wheels; then the wheels broke free, and the ship was in the air.

Burnham climbed straight ahead in a careful slant, seeing Gandor Lake pass under him, seeing Mt. Peyton's grim twin peaks beyond against the horizon. The Newfoundland terrain was incredibly rough, dotted here and there with lakes of every size and shape on whose shores timber crowded to the water-line. There was a virgin summer greenness to the timber, just as there was a virgin ruggedness about the land.

His squadron members thundered off behind him one by one. Circling, Burnham picked up Flight Leader Dirkins on one wing; Flying Officer Dudley took position on the other; one ship at a time, the formation grew into a broad-based V. Sergeant Gentry, in the seat beside Burnham, looked back through his window and then yelled, "They're all here on this side, sir." Burnham nodded, looking back. They were all there on his side, too. Riding a blustery cross tailwind, and steadily gaining altitude, he led them swiftly northeastward toward the sea.

Ten minutes later they could see the coast; fifteen minutes later, at five thousand feet, they crossed Cape Bonavista and roared over the bay, with Gull Island and Old Harry Rocks black and gaunt below. After that the North Atlantic stretched endlessly away to the horizon.

"Ten hours to London," George Burnham thought, and the whole thing seemed utterly incredible. He climbed to eight thousand feet before he leveled off.

They were making excellent speed, better than he had expected, with this wind. He settled to the long, unremitting grind: A minute of concentration on the singing Botwood beam, which laid down a great-circle course to Ireland; a methodical scrutiny of his engine instruments to make sure everything was operating properly; a glance at the North Atlantic chart that he had spread out on his knees; the constant awareness of the thundering exhausts to hear any irregularity in their

steady roar. It would go on like this until daylight faded into the short half-darkness of this northern summer night, or until they encountered fog or clouds or rain; then they would get on their instruments and bore on through.

WHEN they had been in the air an hour, Gentry took a sun-sight and worked out their position to check against the constantly widening Botwood beam. He placed a little cross upon his chart, and yelled their position and ground speed above the bellowing exhausts:

"Our position at nineteen-thirty, Greenwich time, was fifty degrees thirty minutes north latitude, forty-four degrees forty-two minutes west longitude. Speed two-forty-eight!"

George Burnham nodded, watching Gentry enter that data in his log, and then relaxed. He had been worried about his fuel consumption on a straight-through flight, but there was no need to worry now, with such a speed. They would arrive with plenty of reserve petrol; they would be in ahead of time. He throttled back a little, adjusting his manifold pressures for reduced horsepower. These American-built bombers were fast. He made a slight correction of his course to maintain his great-circle track along the beam, and then lighted a cigarette, his mind busy.

His mind was always busy when he was aloft; always he had been able to think more clearly in the cockpit of an airplane than anywhere upon the ground. Now, sitting there leading that hurrying squadron of big planes, he thought of Lindbergh, who had sat up here alone thirteen years ago and wallowed for two days and a night toward Paris; and he considered how much less courage and how much less time it took to make the same flight now. . . . He wondered how many pilots of this squadron would come home from this war alive; and how many would be maimed and useless for the remainder of their days; and how many, in the terrible weeks ahead of them, would grow old in the strange, warped way that war aged

All over the airport the enemy troops were being cut down as by a scythe.

any man. . . . He thought of the senselessness of all this killing and destruction—and yet he was groping bitterly for some way to get into the fight himself, and seeing no way. He had fought in the last war, but now they thought he was too old.

But he wasn't too old, he told himself savagely. And he wanted to fight. For weeks he had lived with a dread haste driving him—the haste to get across so he could fight. Now haste was still driving him, hurtling him eastward over the blank, empty sea. But there seemed a futility about haste now, just as there seemed a futility about himself. He was too old. He would reach England only just in time to start right back.

They went on and on, hour after hour, their speed and altitude unvaried. Repeatedly Sergeant Gentry took his sights and worked out his positions from them. The Botwood beam was a whining finger that stretched over the rounded edges of the earth to guide them. As the sun set, day surrendered to a slow twilight; twilight faded to a ghostly, unreal darkness. They roared on, like a flock of huge migrating birds, their running-lights bright red and green.

Now they were more than halfway across, and George Burnham felt actual boredom. He had always thought a North Atlantic crossing would be fraught with dangers and excitement. Undoubtedly most crossings were, but not this one. Sergeant Gentry was taking star-sights now, instead of sun-sights; his positions were more accurate. They were exactly on their course and all the way their speed had been maintained.

An hour later, when they were only a hundred miles from the west coast of Ireland, Burnham sat up straighter in his seat, feeling a tingle of expectancy as he saw patches of gray fog below. Still later he was aware of clouds above him. When those clouds changed into a solid overcast, he began a gradual descent. A few minutes later the squadron ran into a cold, drizzling rain that smeared the windshields and made the darkness real. The planes closed up their intervals and Burnham held his course with tense alertness now.

There was nothing to be worried about yet, but he felt worried just the same. The ceiling was gradually forcing them on down. It had forced them down to four thousand feet, already. The clouds below them looked solid in great patches, with the inscrutable black sea only occasionally visible now between the breaks. Ahead, the weather looked as if it might get really bad.

George Burnham held his course straight on. He knew his position accurately enough to navigate beyond the hills of Ireland and the mountains of Wales and western England before starting his descent; if he had to, he could keep his formation up here in the clouds, even if the clouds became entirely solid farther on. But he wondered what would happen if a thick fog had rolled in over Kent when he got there, and made it impossible to land. He knew what would happen, and it frightened him. It was not yet two o'clock, London time. Even with the most economical leaning of their engines, the squadron could not

circle over England until much after dawn.

He went on flying, holding his course by his instruments, checking with Sergeant Gentry on their dead-reckoning position—and snatching strained glances through his cockpit window at the fog below. They were over Ireland now, but there were no lights down there to tell him that—or if there were, the vast patches of the lower clouds obscured them. He wondered if he should descend in Ireland, violating orders, and try to find an airport and determine what the weather was ahead.

While he was debating that, suddenly off to the left about ten miles away he saw a bright glow form on the lower overcast. Almost at once another spot appeared beside it, flicking back and forth. And a moment later the clouds began to glow as if a whole town had suddenly burst into flames.

George Burnham's first thought was that the Irish had heard this squadron and had mistaken it for enemy planes approaching on a bombing raid. He knew the Irish had been preparing for weeks to cope with German attempts to effect a quick invasion in an effort to establish bases from which to attack England advantageously. He snatched open his cockpit side window, expecting at any moment to be blinded by anti-aircraft bursts nearby.

HE saw the bursts begin: They flashed above the lower clouds, between the overcasts, like giant firecrackers tossed high in the air and exploding in the dark.

But the flashes were so far away that he knew at once they were not meant for this squadron—and suddenly excitement stormed through all his senses, making his heart hammer in his ears. Ireland had been partially blacked out for weeks. The abrupt play of searchlights on the clouds, the sudden furious action of anti-aircraft guns in a pattern overhead, meant that the enemy was here!

With those searchlights stabbing upward from below, he could see that the lower overcast was not thick here; and he could see that it was somewhat broken. Beyond that, he didn't stop to think. He was supposed to deliver this bombing squadron to Kent, England, but he disregarded that. The Irish had few fighter planes; they might not have any here at all. George Burnham turned and started leading his pilots in a quick descent to investigate this enemy attack.

The squadron went slamming through the clouds and erupted underneath. The rain had slackened somewhat. Emerging from the mist, Burnham could see the searchlights lancing the black sky like incandescent rapiers, whipping their spots along the bottom of the overcast. He could see the muzzle flashes of anti-aircraft guns, like matches struck and instantly snuffed out. And ahead, at almost every level, were those vivid shell bursts searching for targets in the sky.

At this distance it was impossible to see exactly what was happening. But suddenly, among the searchlights down there on the ground, the hideous flashes of bombs burst upward. In those flashes, Burnham saw the silhouettes of hangars. This was an airport—a large airport. A fire burst out, suddenly, a mile or two off to one side.

EVERY instant more guns were belching flame down there. Every instant more bombs were turning the earth into a livid hell. The searchlight beams were swinging back and forth in a desperate effort to single out the planes. The fight was increasing in fury every instant.

Leveled out now at twenty-five hundred feet, just underneath the lower broken clouds, Squadron Leader Burnham circled outside the aura of those flashing bombs and guns, beyond the reach of all the searchlights. Through his open cockpit window, he was trying to estimate the situation, and he was debating what to do. He had only one gun in each bomber, and one gunner. He couldn't do much with that puny firing power. But he was determined to do what he could.

Then, suddenly he saw something that turned him cold and grim and made him forget completely the odds he would be facing if he attempted an attack. In the white beam of a searchlight he saw a dive-bomber roll over on its back and hurtle down. It sliced out of the light, still in the dive. In the darkness the tiny orange jets of its machine-guns were very faintly visible. Almost at once the searchlight's inquisitive beam was gone.

George Burnham pulled his squadron in a little closer, and he was cursing grimly in a hard and angry voice. The dive-bombers—deadly Stukas—were deliberately shooting out the searchlights, one by one. He caught glimpses of others rolling over and entering their dives. And as he watched, suddenly in a searchlight's beam he saw a mass flight of other

planes, immense ones, flying in a broad-based V. Then that light, too, was blacked out by a diving Stuka's slugs.

Through the rain the whole thing was confused, but the significance of such a mass attack transfixed George Burnham with a paralyzing apprehension. This was no ordinary bombing raid, in which planes flew over their objectives, dropped their missiles and escaped before the defenders could effectively strike back. This was an assault in force, in the manner of the modern application of air power, which enabled it to conquer and hold ground. He knew now what those big planes were. They were troop planes filled with parachutists; perhaps tank planes; ordnance planes with munitions, artillery and deadly flame-throwers, all waiting for the Stukas to put the guns and searchlights out of action, so that they could swoop low and drop their parachutists in the protection of the darkness and then, when the troops had stormed the defenders of the airport, land and disgorge matériel.

THIS was the beginning of the blitzkrieg that everyone had been expecting and dreading for so long.... And obviously it was proceeding with success.

For the Stukas had already darkened all but two of the darting beams of light, and they were rapidly silencing the guns. In two minutes more the whole area would be in utter darkness, ready for the next phase of the assault.

The situation was momentarily more desperate. This was the spearhead of the German effort to gain a foothold on Britain's soil. This was the way the resistance of the low countries had been quickly crushed. If this attack succeeded now, the infiltration and out-flanking movements would begin tomorrow with the murderous march of tanks. One of the miracles of aviation was how many men and how much matériel could be consolidated in a few short hours, once a few key airports had been stormed.

Below, the last searchlight blacked out beneath the hail of bullets from a Stuka; and the earth was inscrutable, except for the tiny muzzle-flashes of the few remaining guns. The gun-crews were firing blindly now, in sheer defiance; but they were not doing any good. Protected by the darkness and the rain, the Stukas were probably still diving; it was impossible to see.

Bathed in a cold sweat, George Burnham tried to decide what he should do. In a moment, now, the troop ships would be swooping low and disgorging their parachutists. In the intense darkness, while the Stukas kept the field's defenders occupied, the parachutists would have a chance to land and organize in force; attacked both from the air and from the ground, the defenders would be quickly killed or driven out. For the first time in almost nine hundred years, an invasion of England might in a few days become an actuality.

IT made George Burnham frantic to consider his impotence. He thought of leading his squadron blindly in and attacking with his guns—a single light machine-gun in each plane. That would be only quick and futile suicide. In rain and darkness, with his enemy able to dodge and out-maneuver him, he would never get within gun range—or if he did, collisions would account for nearly every man behind him in his flight.

But he had to stop those parachutists some way, and he had to prevent the landing of the enemy supply planes. Help, if it was coming, would be ineffective now. It would not become effective until daylight enabled the fighter pilots—if fighter planes were coming—to single out their targets. And after daylight it would be too late.

He went on turning in the rain and night, straining his eyes through the open cockpit window. He couldn't see a thing except the muzzle-flashes of the guns and the exploding bombs and bursting anti-aircraft shells. Each time a shell exploded there was a small momentary glare that filled the sky, but the light was gone too quickly to enable him to catch sight of other planes.

But suddenly those explosions of quick light gave him an idea of how to stop the parachutists. It crossed his mind that to attempt it might mean the sacrifice of many of his squadron—many of the boys whom he had trained. But that was a risk they all must take.

Quickly, he started climbing to the level of the upper overcast. In the climb, he yelled at Sergeant Gentry, and his voice was raucous and imperative: "Get forward and man that gun! When you see an enemy ship in range, blast it into hell! If you ever shot straight, shoot straight now!"

The cockpit was in darkness, but he could see the blur of Gentry's face as the sergeant left his seat to crawl into the bombardier's bay.

Still in the climb five miles from the field, Burnham flicked on his low-power inter-squadron wireless transmitter. He had to risk his orders being picked up by the Germans. He gave terse instructions to his squadron, and then, just underneath the upper overcast, leveled off and reduced speed and turned back into the wind to fly across the airport.

He knew he had to do this thing exactly right to make it work—and even if he did it right, he knew it still might fail. The lower overcast was only seven hundred feet thick here, but it was solid. Light from the searchlights had come up through it without glare; he thought light from above would filter through below without glare too. But he had to figure windage, and time everything down to a second.

He rolled out of his turn, and looked back through his window. The first two planes of the formation had moved over into echelon behind him. The others had fallen back still farther. When he was on the windward side of the airport, he reached and pulled the handles of the cables that released his landing-flares.

Almost at once an immense white light flung back the darkness between the overcasts—a blinding light from Burnham's two flares, and from the four dropped by the two planes in the echelon. Surrounded by that brilliance, Burnham nosed into a turning dive to hurtle through the overcast. The two ships with him stayed in their positions like pegs driven into holes. Nine planes remained above the overcast to drop more flares when these burned out.

Burnham's flight emerged below, and here the flare-light was not blinding; it filtered through the lower overcast and turned the earth to a sickly bluish day. Even in the milky spitting rain it was possible to see the airport with its bomb craters and its ghastly ruined hangars. And it was possible to see another thing: it filled George Burnham with dull rage.

He was too late! The mass formation of enemy troop planes was already flying low above the field, and the white blobs of parachutes were exploding in profusion at low altitude.

He cursed himself for having made the error in his timing. He could not attack as he had planned; the enemy planes already were crossing the airport, and in a moment would be swallowed by the ring of darkness beyond the aura of the flares. Even now, in the dazzling light above, it was difficult to see them clearly.

One Stuka, fire spurting from its belly, plunged onto the field.

And then, as the flares on their parachutes descended through the lower clouds and shed a direct light on the earth, it was practically impossible to see the planes at all. Burnham could discern only their swift shadows, moving in close order out into the night. It was the parachutists, landing at that moment, who were clearly visible, by their shadows on the ground.

Hurrying, Burnham twisted out of his steep dive and swung back across the airport at one hundred feet. It was the parachutists who constituted the greatest danger now. There were at least five hundred of them. Already most of them had landed. Some had extricated themselves from their parachute-harness, and some were running for the bomb craters that the Stukas had just made. Into his wireless, Burnham barked the order to attack.

He could hear Sergeant Gentry's machine-gun stutter in the nose; he could smell the acrid fumes of burning cordite. On the ground, under that bright light, figures were collapsing in their shadows. All over the airport the enemy troops were being cut down as by a scythe. At this close range, the strafing fire of the machine-guns was deadly as it swept the field.

THE first attack lasted less than thirty seconds. When he was across the airport, beyond his target, Burnham pulled up to come around and strafe those troops again.

And when he turned, in the flarelight he saw back through his window a formation of six Stukas thundering down to attack him from behind.

They had the advantage of altitude and speed and fire power. In a quick flash of perception, Burnham knew his only hope was to escape into the darkness. But he saw, too, that he could never turn and reach that darkness soon enough. Surprised here in the open, he was helpless; he and his two wing men didn't have a chance.

But only two of the six Stukas even started their attack. For suddenly, out of the flarelight higher up, six of the bombers which had been left aloft to drop their flares came hurtling down, their nose guns spitting jets of orange flame. Even in the confused excitement of the moment, George Burnham had a feeling of quick pride. These boys of his knew what to do in war without his telling them. Some of them had dropped below that lower overcast, to keep track of their position and to see what might develop. They had seen the Stukas moving in to dive. And so they had dived, using their bombers as if they had been fighters! They were striking viciously.

One of the Stukas rolled over on its side and crashed. Another pulled up across the field, fire spurting from its belly, and then plunged and scattered flame in all directions when it hit. Two others dived straight in. The others fired one burst each and pulled up to escape.

Burnham swung out into the darkness, circling the field and climbing, waiting for the troop supply-planes to come back across the field to drop their guns and ammunition. The thought went through his mind that after all, he had had what he wanted—a battle in this war.

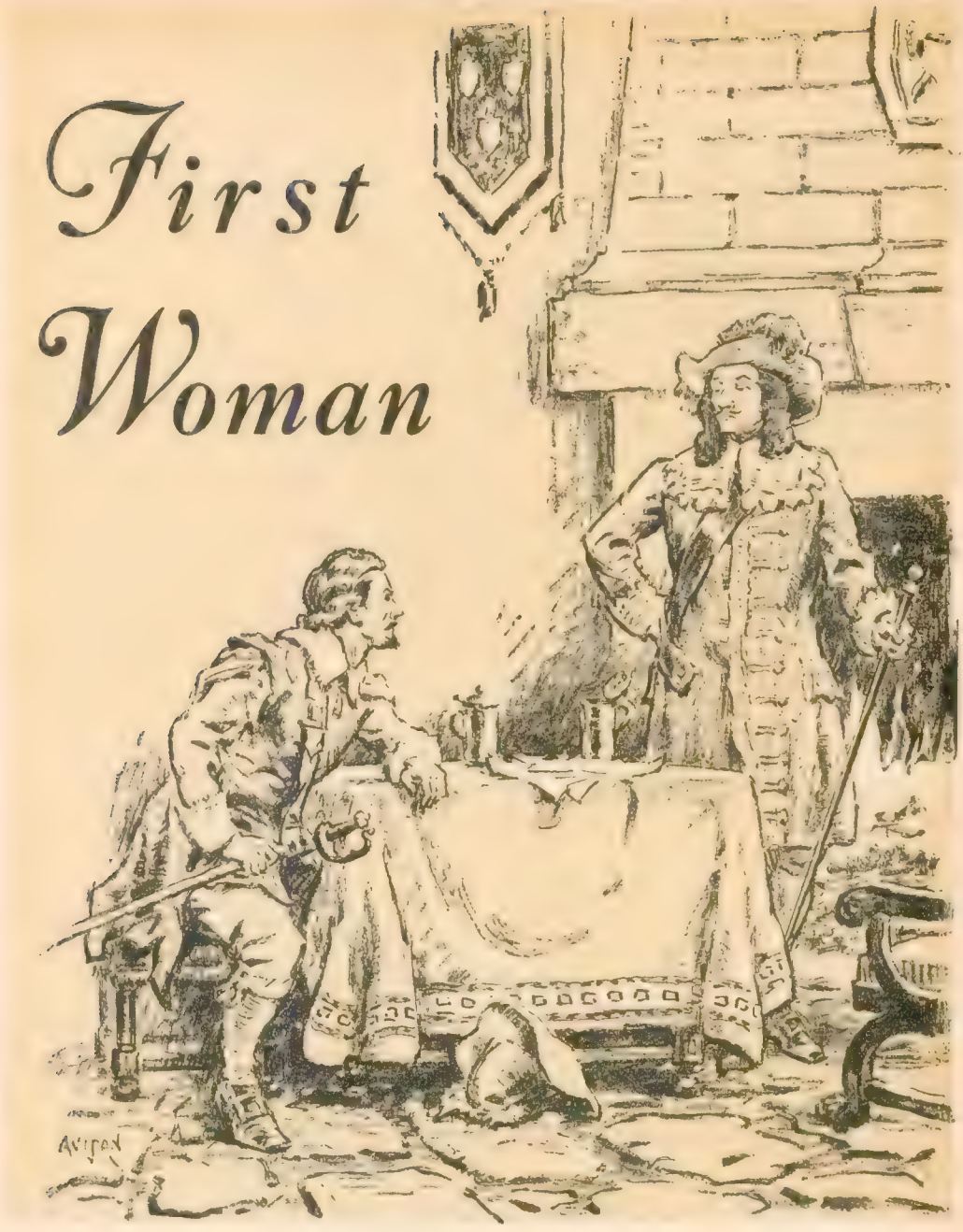
BUT he didn't think he wanted any more. He had failed to attack the parachute planes awhile ago, because he'd taken time for caution; he'd been slow. He wondered where he would be now, if these boys of his, led by young Dirkins, had been cautious and thus slow. He knew well enough where he would be: He would be down there on the ground, already dead, with fire searing him!

The supply-planes didn't slide across the field to drop their cargo; the enemy seemed to have withdrawn abruptly. Above, one after another, the flares kept lighting up the sky. In another hour dawn would come, and then all danger would be over for today, because there weren't enough parachutists left to hold out long. When dawn came, these new bombers could go down and land, or sooner, if they started to run low on fuel; they could drop more flares. But until then Burnham thought he ought to keep them up here on patrol.

Circling the field, he realized that he was trembling. He hadn't known how scared he'd been. He wondered how he could have been so reckless and utterly insane in the last war. It seemed incomprehensible to him now, at forty-five. But he knew one thing: His place was back in Trenton, not flying at the front. These young men of his were amply competent to cope with any situation they might meet in battle, but they couldn't do it—and look after him!

He grinned into the darkness, feeling a lot better. After landing and refueling, he would take his squadron on to Kent. When he got there, he should just have time to catch a train to Liverpool.

First Woman



This seventh story of "The World Was Their Stage" introduces the first actress in England—and a bitter drama behind the scenes.

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

KILGORE tossed the sheaf of papers to the table.

"There's the new play; I'll have no share in it. The thing's vile, Mordaunt. You may be Master of the King's Players and friend of half the court gallants, but you'll come a cropper unless you call a halt on this obscenity."

Sir James Mordaunt chuckled. "Hal, the people will love it! Art become a Roundhead Puritan, eh? You've changed queerly, lad, since we came down from Oxford together."

Mordaunt had been an actor and a good one, before he inherited a title and went into the business end of the theater,

"Bear with me. Until tomorrow, let us be friends."

with a lease on the Globe. The two men were sitting now in the greenroom of the Globe, beneath the boxes; a fire was blazing in the hearth, for it was a cold February afternoon of 1629.

A handsome man was Mordaunt, talented, witty, with a superb arrogance of air and feature that became him well. Only Kilgore was aware of the shadow behind those bold eyes, of something awry in the man's nature, like a stratum of rotten rock in a hillside.

"I've not changed, James," replied Kilgore. "I think you have. Five years ago, that play would have horrified you. Today you laugh at it. I'll have none of it; that's flat!"

Mordaunt sipped his mulled ale and stretched his toes nearer the fire.

"Bad policy, Hal, to quarrel with your bread and butter."

"My bread? God forbid!" said Kilgore angrily. "Do you ever give the grand plays of Marlowe, of Shakespeare, of the others? No! Instead, you put on hastily written things stolen from some Spanish farce, depending upon obscene jests to carry them across!"

"An excellent Roundhead sermon, by gad!" Mordaunt's tone was light, but his eyes darkened ominously. "Here, take some of the good Virginia weed, and think upon Sunday night, when Ma'mselle Rachel startles the world—the first woman ever to play upon our English stage! There'll be triumphs for us all, and greater ones to come. Too bad if your refusal to take part in the next play should force the breaking of your contract—after the Sunday night's performance."

A startling threat here, but Kilgore gave no sign he heard it.

He took his big pewter tankard from before the fire, quaffed the warmed ale and filled his long-stemmed pipe. It was not without an inward sigh that he cast a glance at the other man—handsome, successful, beloved of the women and a friend of gallants. There was all he himself might have been, and was not.

Smallpox had marred his face, ending his dream of fame and fortune as an actor. A man could not hide his skin under paint and powder, as did the boys who played female rôles. He had flung himself into comic parts, and had great skill in arranging and altering plays; thus he was useful in the King's Company, but could easily be replaced.

The French war, last year, had wiped out his entire fortune. Love too had been frightened off, by that scarred cheek of his. Most of his friends in the profession had taken umbrage at his opinions. Small wonder, then, that his grave, strong features held a deep bitterness, as Mordaunt went on:

"For your harsh words, Hal, the day's past when the people are content with

bear-baiting outside the theater and tragic ranting inside. We give 'em what they want; shrewd wit, a bit o' spice, none of your heavy soberside stuff. Leave that to the damned Puritans! If ladies of pleasure frequent the pit, that's none of our business."

Kilgore checked his impulsive words. He was no Puritan; but the headlong dive that the theater had taken since King Charles came to the throne, was only too clear to him. The traditions of restraint of an older generation were swept away; depravity and vice ran rampant in plays and pit alike. Mademoiselle Rachel, discovering the nature of these plays, and the meaning of some of her lines, had protested indignantly; but she had too bitter need of the money to throw up the job that had brought her to London. A grand young woman, this Rachel, and Kilgore's heart warmed to the thought of her—in which sentiment he was not alone.

"I'll not argue the matter, James," he rejoined. "Nor will I act in that new play."

"We've drifted far apart of late," the other said darkly.

"Far apart," repeated Kilgore, uncompromising. He puffed at his pipe. "Break my contract, eh? I suppose you need me the first night with Rachel; then you can throw Jem Alleyne into my part."

"Confound you!" Mordaunt's eyes glittered at him angrily. "Leave me in the lurch, and you'll never again tread a stage in London town, Hal Kilgore!"

AT this way of putting it, Kilgore broke into a laugh.

"Saddle me with the blame and threaten me to boot, eh? Nonsense, James! You've no threat that has teeth. I'm sick unto death of this stage and its obscenity. Besides, all the theater, as a whole, is sinking lower every day and will soon be done for. A higher type of dramatic form is rising."

"What? Puritan sermons?" sneered the other.

"No; masques. You know how they're in favor abroad, and they have a great future here. Decent people can attend them without having to hear language no courtesan can stomach. They'll survive, when the stage itself is abolished."

"Fat chance of that!" said Mordaunt, laughing. "Wait till we've set the new fashion with Rachel and you see how people crowd to hear the pretty creatures rant and rave! Real women, instead of painted boys! And the more spicy their language, the more delighted will the audience be."

Kilgore choked down his anger. Mademoiselle Rachel had come from Paris to show how women's parts might be better played by women than by boys; she was rehearsing with them now for the first appearance of any woman on the English stage. The scandal of it was shaking half London, with street preachers invoking hell-fire and brimstone on all sides; and, it must be admitted, with some excuse. The other half of London, which at the moment was the more important half, was thrilled and expectant and eager to see the novelty.

Rachel, who knew little or no English, was meanwhile being taught her rôle, parrot-fashion.

"And while I think of it," went on Mordaunt, with a chuckle, "we'll touch up Rachel's part a bit. She'll not need to know that the words mean; faith, that'll make it all the more fetching!"

THIS was the spark. Kilgore's face changed, and his voice leaped.

"Mordaunt, she's a good woman, a fine woman. You'd not play so dirty a trick? Surely, not even you could be sunk so low as that!"

How those words bit! Into the dark, lean features of Sir James Mordaunt crept a flush of quick anger.

"So there lies the land, eh?" he sneered. "Well, put her out of your mind; she's mine, or will be when the time's ripe. She's for no prating Roundhead."

"She's not for you, and mayhap not for your theater either," rapped out Kilgore, with a flash of temper that he regretted instantly.

Mordaunt half rose. "What d'ye mean by that, damn you?"

"That she's too good, of course." Deftly, Kilgore saved himself from revealing too much. "She's too good for you, and for this pit of obscenity you control."

"Oh!" Mordaunt relaxed, finished his ale, and rose. He looked down at Kilgore with coldly biting eyes. "Well, until Sunday night our roads still run together; keep to your own side. We'll part friends, at least on the surface—provided you take my advice. Leave Rachel alone. Better still," he added, "give her the full advantage of your handsome countenance; then she'll not be tempted."

He swung out of the dressing-room.

Those last words had been cruelly arrogant beyond belief, deliberately lashing Kilgore on the raw; well did Mordaunt know how sensitive he was on the subject of his scarred face. Yet, deeply as they pierced, Kilgore was far too strong of soul to let himself be flung off balance. He quivered to the hurt, but he gave no reply. After all, he was making his own plans for a stroke that would be more devastating than any words.

He knew Mordaunt's threats were not idle ones. Between these two men the olden friendship had ripened and rotted, to burst like a mildewed fruit upon the rock of occasion, when Rachel came to London.

"And now he means to fatten her rôle with more obscenity and lie to her about it!" Kilgore thought angrily. "Well, thank heaven our paths divide! Today's Friday; on Sunday night it's ended. And I'm ended as well—unless Arlington has the right answer tonight!"

FINISHING his ale at leisure, he enjoyed another pipe, and his nerves were calm again when the players began to arrive for rehearsal. Mordaunt returned, escorting Rachel; her radiant presence, her broken English, and her youthful charm made the dingy greenroom seem a different place.

For the sake of warmth, the rehearsal was held here. In her rôle of French lass in London, a rôle and play slapped together overnight to take advantage of her poor English, Rachel was bewitching. Even the company could scarce keep a straight face as she mouthed the bawdy allusions which she herself did not understand; but Kilgore went through his lines grimly. As they stood together for a moment, he had the chance he sought.

"Tonight?" he said under his breath. He spoke French well.

"At nine," she rejoined, and it was understood.

She was divinely feminine; a graceful, sloe-eyed creature radiating magnetism and personality. To Kilgore, she was something far more. He had learned her depths of warm friendliness, her shrewd wit, her mental acuity; he knew, too, how rare and delicately precious a spirit abided here.

From her first arrival in London she had trusted him, as indeed did most people. Hal Kilgore held many an unguessed secret in his keeping. He knew she was no haphazard wench, and the old Frenchwoman who posed as her mother was actually a servant. More than this, his knowledge was vague. She had not even told her actual name.

Of her shadowy background, he knew that her father had forfeited his life and his estates because of some plot against Richelieu—one of many. Left a beggar, the daughter took the name of Rachel, joined a company of players, and had made her way. She was no great lady, but came, he thought, from some good provincial family. And this was the sum of his knowledge.

Rehearsal ended, Kilgore hastily departed. He went to his lodgings, obtained a hurried supper, changed his careless garb for richer attire, buckled on his sword-belt, and was off again, footing it across London to the house of Lord Arlington.

Upon this hour hung destiny. All his plans and hopes were coming now to fruition or to complete ruin. His great dream was coming true, or it was not; within a moment, upon a word! For he had shared this dream with Arlington; and Lord Arlington had in his younger days written a masque; consequently, the seed fell upon fruitful ground.

Not that Arlington was any exponent of the virtues. Kilgore's father had known him before the day of ruin and poverty; hence Kilgore appealed to him, for at least he could see the practical side of this vision. Since the death of King James, four years back, Arlington had been out of favor, aloof from London and the court, spending most of the time at his noble Tudor estate of Carlin Hall in Sussex. His last employment, at the French court, had ended very badly—indeed, it was said that Richelieu had demanded his recall. Despite this, Arlington was too subtle and unscrupulous a man to remain forever in disgrace, and Kilgore was confident the upswing would carry himself and his dreams with it. If he did not admire Arlington's methods, at least he could admire the man.

HE found Arlington alone before a warm fire, a decanter of wine on the table with glorious tall glasses of Venetian make, and tobacco. The two shook hands, and Arlington turned quickly to the table, filling the glasses. He extended one.

"Success, Kilgore!" he exclaimed, smiling warmly. "A health to my masque, and to your future! The masque will be played for the King. You will play it. Success!"

The glasses clinked. Mordaunt scarcely tasted the wine; with those words, he knew that everything was won. So it was, both for himself and for Lord Arlington.

This nobleman was neither handsome nor impulsive, but he had a warm, winning air and the ability to gain men's trust. Deep eyes in a chunky face whose heavy lines were belied by a sparkle of humor—physically he was an awkward man, but mentally alert and flashing of spirit. Those who trusted him too much came away second-best, it was said; but Hal Kilgore had everything to win and nothing to lose.

"King Charles will visit us at Carlin Hall after Easter," he said, and in those words Kilgore realized that the upswing had started. Arlington, after Easter, would be one of England's rulers once more. "And the masque—why, Kilgore, 'twas a noble inspiration! The masque will go straight to his heart! The changes you made in the manuscript are splendid."

"I'm glad you approve them," said Kilgore.

"I'll turn Carlin Hall over to you. Lady Arlington will remain there; I'll stop in London a bit and settle a few things; you shall go there as soon as you're ready and take full charge of the production. Success!"

Another health was drunk. Kilgore understood that his production of this masque must win the King's heart; he had no worries here. Now he was thinking beyond, of his own dream.

"And have you considered the other matter?" he asked.

"Oh! Egad, Kilgore, it's a great idea!" Arlington fairly beamed. "I've discussed it with one or two friends. Granted the King's favor, of which I think we're assured, the scheme's a magnificent one—a bid for Puritan favor too, mind you. There's one doubtful point, and that's this French actress Rachel."

Kilgore's brows lifted. "Doubtful?"

"Aye. Thus far we've taken your word regarding her. We'll see her at the play, of course—"

"You'll see her in half an hour," broke in Kilgore, smiling. "She receives us."

"Excellent! And she's not bound to Mordaunt and the Globe?"

"No. He wanted to see if the experiment succeeds; he was not too sure how the people would like a woman on the stage. So he made no contract. Now I've warned her, and both of us will leave the Globe after the one performance on Sunday night. Mordaunt can get some other girl to replace her overnight—I happen to know of two or three women he had in mind, before he resolved to bring Rachel from Paris."

"Then all promises well." Arlington leaned back, his eyes twinkling, and filled a pipe for himself. "If she makes a suc-

Upon this hour hung destiny; his hopes were coming now to fruition—or to complete ruin.

cess in the one performance, and leaves, the public will tumble over themselves to see her once your new house opens."

"Eh? My house?" repeated Kilgore.

The other laughed.

"Just so. The plan is that you're to be placed in full charge; none of us will appear in the venture. There's no question about the money end of it. We'll subscribe ten thousand pounds if need be. Meantime, I'll advance what's necessary. You know what it means?"

KILGORE took fire. For himself, here was fame and fortune; but greater than this was the fulfillment of the dream that was more to him than ambition, and the fact that others had realized his vision and found it good.

"It means the greatest thing that's ever happened to dramatic art!" he exclaimed. "It means the end of the old theater, the rise of the new! No more of these bawdy plays. Instead, a house where only masques and such things are given, where wit replaces vice, where nimble flights of fancy and poetry may appeal to the nobler side of our audiences!"

"And also something more practical," Arlington added, suddenly grave. "It's the practical side that interests me and the others, Kilgore. This Rachel isn't the first woman to act on the English stage."

"What? But she is!" replied Kilgore, astonished.

Arlington shook his head.

"No. In 1593 a performance of 'The Jew of Malta' was given before Queen Elizabeth. A Manchester lass was on the stage that night, for the first time. Her name was Jenny, and she was no lady but a prostitute. She made trouble; the Queen was furious; that ended females on the stage. Now, when your Rachel appears, there will be a tremendous Puritan reaction—in fact, it's already begun, as you must know. Add to this, the present situation that threatens bloodletting on all sides; d'ye see the point?"

Kilgore hesitated. It was true that dissension and hatred were rising to terrific heights, these days. At this moment King Charles was in a senseless and stubborn battle with Parliament, stopping little short of actual force. Headstrong nobles fought one another, and Puritans fought the wastrels of fortune.

"No," said Kilgore slowly, "I'm afraid I don't see what you're driving at."

"Let the theater continue as it is and you have a tremendous irritant. Well, I propose to abolish it altogether! We'll take the part of virtue; away with this Satanic abscess! Away with this theater that debases fair womanhood! Away with those foul rogues who dare to employ women in public representations of virtue unrewarded!"

He affected a nasal whine, and a thin, ironic smile played about his lips.

"Now d'ye get it, Kilgore? Abolish the theater, by gad! At one stroke, we make a bold play for Roundhead approval, and do it in the King's name! Then we make use of your one playhouse that remains—where masques, not plays, are given—to affect popular opinion. We make use of it, deliberately, cleverly; here's an instrument that can be of enormous value to us! Why, damme if we won't have the Puritans themselves writing masques!"

"I should have known," said Kilgore thoughtfully, "that you'd serve your own interest somehow."

Arlington, far from taking umbrage at the words, laughed in cynic amusement.

"Right; and here my interest lies in avoiding ruin. Charles is alienating London; and no King can endure in England if the City is against him. With Wentworth, Newcastle and one or two others, I propose to change all this and avoid a civil war; the theater and the printed word will be our greatest aids."

Kilgore nodded, and his face cleared. "Why not? A good cause; count me in, with all my heart! May I offer my congratulations upon what is evidently a return to power?"

"AYE; and mine, upon your ability to see the future!" Arlington rose and clapped him heartily on the shoulder. "Lad, I've all the strings of ambition in my hand. When the King visits Carlin Hall, Arlington becomes another Buckingham—and of greater value to England than was George Villiers, God rest him! There are abuses to be corrected and hot hearts to be assuaged; and I'll not lose by the doing, either. Yet no one else can see what I see ahead," he added with deepening gravity. "Bad going to worse, the King and the people at loggerheads—stubborn ruler, and people cherishing their liberties! That's the thing to avoid; conflict, ruin, bloodshed! And with your help and that of the stage, I propose to do it. All ready? Come along, let's be on our way."

Thus abruptly, he showed Kilgore his heart, and then closed the matter to dis-

cussion. But the brief revelation held the player spellbound.

Arlington could write a masque, and a good one; as envoy to France he had tried wits against Richelieu and failed; as one of the ministry, he had botched things and fallen before the more brilliant Buckingham. But now Kilgore saw a new and different phase of him. The cynic, self-seeking nobleman had become attuned to vision. He, and he alone, grasped what might come of England's internal dissension; he, and he alone, could swing Newcastle, Wentworth and the other great lords to act with him. Even, perhaps, the King.

And as sounding-board and agent and assistant, Hal Kilgore and the new theater of the masque and pageant! The evil of the old theater swept away, and with it, for the nonce, all plays and drama; these would return, of course, but in cleansed form.

"One thing," said Kilgore, as they neared the lodging-house where Rachel and her supposed mother lived. "I would say to do away with the taint of the old theater by never letting it get started in the new. Masques are no new thing, but we'll give them new strength and meaning. Therefore, I'd say to keep them clean from the start."

"Agreed," Arlington replied. "My sister and wife will take parts in the masque at Carlin Hall. The Queen, accustomed to masques at the French court, will set the fashion at Whitehall; I have her word for it. Therefore, rule your new domain with an iron hand! And if it would please you to be Sir Harry Kilgore, you can earn the title by Easter."

So he had the Queen's backing! Kilgore perceived how deeply Arlington had already builded, and how sure were the foundations. This heartened him, even more than the hint of a knighthood; past any doubt, Arlington was the man of coming power in England!

WHEN their destination was reached, Kilgore was walking on air.

Rachel received them in the sitting-room of her lodgings.

Afterward, he remembered her pallor, her confusion, when Arlington stooped over her hand with his polished French phrases; at the moment, however, Kilgore noticed nothing, so exhilarated was he by the glorious vista ahead.

He could not contain himself for the sheer joy of it, but poured out before her all that it would mean to her as well as to him—performance before the King, the favor of the Queen, a theater in London, where only the finest type of spectacles would be given. More than this he said not, for Arlington had cautioned him regarding the need of secrecy; but this was enough to gild all the future for them both. It brought a sparkle of laughter to her eyes, and Arlington was obviously captivated by her charm; he expanded; he threw off his years; he set free all the merry vivacity which in other days had made his name famous. The man was transformed, and Kilgore marveled at what he saw. There was no doubt that Rachel had set herself to bewitch him, and had succeeded.

"ON Sunday night, I shall prove my devotion," said he, laughing. "I'll have one of the boxes above the green-room, and shall have the honor of acclaiming the first actress in England! And after the performance, you and the entire company shall then dine with me. Agreed?"

"Sir James Mordaunt has already bade me to supper," she replied, with a pretty blush. "How can I offend him, milord?"

"Nonsense! How not?" broke in Kilgore, laughing. "We quit the Globe company, you and I, after the performance! Therefore, no halfway measures—as your new manager and producer, I command you!"

She swept him a mock-humble curtsy, and turned to Arlington.

"You see, milord, I am helpless! Let it be as you desire."

So it was settled.

Afterward, as the two of them walked along the cold street, Arlington, with a touch of fantasy, blew a kiss to the stars.

"Kilgore, she's all you proclaimed her, and more! The world of the theater has changed forever; I'll wager anything that after Sunday evening there'll be never a a play produced without at least one actress! When do you plan to take her to Carlin Hall?"

"If possible, on the Monday."

"Wise man! My coach shall be at your disposal. Every gallant in London will be sighing his heart out for her; get her away at once into Lady Arlington's care. Faith," he added, laughing, "were I ten years younger and less pleasantly married, I might be among the gallants myself! But she's a rare woman, Kilgore; rarely beautiful and rarely virtuous, if I'm any judge, and must come of a fine family. She's not here all alone?"

"No; an old woman who poses as her mother, and whom I take to be a family servant. And, I believe, a lackey of some kind. I've not set eyes on him, but Mordaunt mentioned him once or twice. Hm! Mordaunt won't be a joyous man on Monday; I'd like to hear him rave!"

"Your Mordaunt, be damned to him, had best not rave too loud," said Arlington, in his carelessly arrogant way. "His day is done; yours begins; and since siller talks better than any tongue, as the Scots say, here's a hundred pounds to bind our bargain. No, thank me not! We'll go far together, Kilgore, and England shall forgive us much that we've left undone, for what we do from this time forward."

Kilgore pocketed the purse, parted at Arlington's door with a warm clasp of the hand, and went back to his own lodgings a new man.

He slept that night upon fitful dreams; he could scarce believe what had happened. At the darkest point, the door to life and fortune was opening before him, and if he had met the slings of fortune valiantly in the past, he must now greet the future with shrewd care. Gone was bitterness; when he wakened in the morning and got out soap and razor, he looked into the mirror with a smile.

"Thou rascal face!" he exclaimed to the pock-scarred countenance that greeted him and smiled back. "No longer a symbol of defeat, exchange that sullen indignity for a brave and confident token of the future!"

He laughed as he began to shave. Life was once more good. And he owed

it all to one man, the only man in England who could see his vision—and who could see a farther vision as well.

He could look around him now with new eyes. The riots in London, the fury against the King, the struggle with Parliament, the bitter-voiced Puritans—all this would pass, for one man had a vision of what was needed. One man, who had learned from sad experience and from failure how to create aright and how to succeed in greater things. Arlington, seeking no longer the road of personal ambition, but guided by a truer and nobler aim!

"That way is changed, the destiny of nations and men," reflected Kilgore. "Without this vision of his, this virtue of having learned from bitter experience, England might well go to wrack and ruin and even to civil war. Instead, it comes to adjustment. Just as I myself, but for this man, would have lost future and hope and my own vision—whereas I now see clearly, and have work to do that shall erect a dream into glorious things!"

He was busy at the Globe this day; there were some new decorations, a simple set to erect, for the platform-stage. He was already full of ideas about the new theater, with a proscenium arch and a stage no longer surrounded by the audience, in the Italian fashion.

Further, his were certain details to manage regarding costumes for the morrow, and for the dress rehearsal this afternoon. They marveled at him, one and all; even Mordaunt, who showed up with dour mien, warmed a bit.

"Hast changed heart, Hal?" said he, speaking privately. "Gad, you look ten years younger! You'll stay with us?"

"Not I," Kilgore rejoined, with a smile. "It's the prospect of shaking from my feet the dust of this stage that's made life gay!"

Mordaunt's face darkened. "Then, by heaven, you'll never set foot on another stage in London town!" he snapped, and turned away.

Kilgore could well afford to laugh at threats this day, but there was no further jar; having vented his spleen, Mordaunt gave his attention to business.

The dress rehearsal, again held in the green-room to avoid the expense of heating the outer space, went off to a nicety. Rachel arrived, escorted today by her lackey—a tall gaunt square-shouldered Frenchman who swaggered like a bravo and wore his sword slung in a baldric, French-fashion. He was a man of forty-odd, Kilgore estimated, and spoke no English at all.

Arlington sensed the threat too late; swift as light, the man lunged.

As for Rachel, at first Kilgore fancied that she avoided him; but when he secured a word with her apart, she smiled and putting her hand in his, said gently:

"My friend, bear with me; until tomorrow night, let us still be friends."

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded quickly, searching her face. "You don't seem yourself today."

"I'm not myself," she said, and her eyes met his with a sudden hard light. "I must do you hurt, and myself as well; there's no way out, so face it and make the best of it. Can you carry on your program without me?"

"If necessary, yes," he rejoined, startled. "But why? What has happened to change you? For, by heaven, you're changed!"

That queer coldness in her eyes, that hardness, was past understanding. It wakened him to a storm of dismayed emotion. From a friend, a confidant, an intimate, she had abruptly become distant, another person indeed. From dismay, however, he passed to angry readjustment.

"My program—you mean by that word all the dream, the vision of which you know?" he went on. "Yes, it can proceed without you or without me; it's greater than either of us. But why should it? Why are you changed? Why, only last night everything was agreed!"

"That was last night," she said coldly.

"What's all this mystery about?" demanded the exasperated Kilgore. "Come, let's have it out and reach an explanation! Has something happened that I don't know?"

"Yes," she replied. "Let it wait till tomorrow night; then you'll understand everything. Upon my honor!"

KILGORE'S face cleared.

"Agreed, then! And you'll sup with Arlington?"

"No, I will not," she said bluntly. "Ask no more now, I pray you!"

Kilgore whistled softly to himself, thinking that he understood. Perhaps Lord Arlington had not been so platonic after all; something had happened, evidently, to set Rachel against him. Well, it might be overcome or mended.

If not—then what? Kilgore did not mistake her nature; she was headstrong, for all her gentleness, and had a steely something within her eyes that might hint at trouble. He had set his heart upon having her, and had builded upon her acquiescence in his dream; but that dream could go its way without her, if need were. The loss would be great, the disappointment grievous, but she was not an essential.

"The one essential is Arlington," Kilgore reflected. "If she wants to back out of it, well and good. Perhaps Mordaunt has made her some glittering offer, and she's inclined to take it; that's her affair. I've done my best for her."

He was, indeed, more than a little inclined to resent her attitude, for his interest in her was vivid and personal; he had fancied that she was even able to overlook his scarred face, that in her eyes he could read the things he had sought and never found. Not so? Then best discover the truth now, he told himself, and not live in self-deception. Ahead was a future too great and glowing, too filled with action, too pregnant with destiny, for any assaults to be allowed to shake it at this stage of the game. Find the truth, accept it, make the best of it!

"Even if I must flatter Arlington and play the sycophant, it'll be in a grand cause," Kilgore told himself that night, as he thought upon the matter. "He's the keystone of all, and on him I must build for our mutual advantage. Damn the women! Who can understand 'em?"

MEANTIME, he had the hundred pounds for assurance.

Sunday wore its anxious length at last, a Sunday wherein half London was whipped up to screaming pitch by strident Puritans. A woman on the stage! The point was magnified out of all proportion until it rasped the nerves like a raw wound; one might well believe that Satan himself was appearing at the Globe this night.

In consequence, the place was jam-packed that night by opposition crowds. Court gallants, Roundhead-hating city men, gentry great and small, ladies of the only sort who might appear at such public interludes—boxes and pit were crammed. Link-boys flitted their torches in the streets. Heads were bloodied here and there. It was a bawling, riotous, lustily forthright crowd, anxious to applaud Satan and all his works.

And applaud they did, while the walls shook. Rachel scintillated until even the actors of the company were astonished; never had she seemed so radiant, so filled with abundant life and energy and laughter. The platform-stage, almost surrounded by the audience, was directly under the boxes built above the green-room; in one of these boxes sat Arlington and some friends, aiding the thunderous applause. Gifts and coins came rattling upon the boards; it was a harvest for all hands this night.

In the final act Kilgore was on at the opening, then off for good. At his exit, he glanced up at the boxes, and to his surprise saw that Arlington now seemed to be alone; he thought little of it, however. He made haste to shift into his street-clothes, and as he was doing so, an attendant brought him a hasty word.

"My Lord Arlington's compliments, Mr. Kilgore, and he asks if you'll join

him in his box, since his company have departed."

Kilgore nodded assent. Just what the program was for the evening, he had still to learn; probably Arlington wanted him to talk to Rachel, he thought. No one else was in the green-room, at the moment, except the queer French lackey who had accompanied his mistress, and who sat guarding her clothes and playing absently with his grizzled chin-tuft.

His dressing finished, Kilgore hastened to the box overhead. In the most recent rebuilding and overhaul of the Globe, these boxes had been given some comfort as well as privacy from the boxes to right and left. When Kilgore stepped in, Arlington gave him a smiling glance and a gesture; Rachel was on the stage below. Silent, Kilgore took a stool and listened. That smiling greeting was enough to assure him that all was well.

And now, in what followed—where lay chance, where lay careful design? Kilgore never learned. But surely it was not by chance, that Lord Arlington sat here thus alone!

FOR suddenly the curtain at the back was lifted, and into the box stepped the stalwart grizzled lackey. He spoke in French, swiftly, imperatively:

"Milord! You do not remember me?"

Arlington looked around. "Eh? Who the devil are you?"

"Milord, you should know me. I was the servant and lackey and friend of the Comte de Caulain, whom you knew some years ago in Paris."

"Eh?" Arlington came to his feet, and at the name his face changed. "Upon my word, so you are! What are you doing here?"

Kilgore, astonished, saw the lackey bow respectfully. The man's grave manner gave him no disquiet; nor did Arlington appear alarmed.

"Milord, M. le Comte was beheaded, you may recall, because he trusted you," came the words. "You betrayed him to Richelieu. Because of you, the damned Cardinal murdered him and left his daughter a beggar."

Arlington frowned abruptly. "I had nothing to do with the matter. Be off, fellow! I didn't even know your master had a daughter."

"But she, monsieur, knew that her father had a murderer," said the lackey, still with that grave, intent manner. "She is down there, on this stage; Rachel, they call her. She wanted me to tell you this."

"Gad!" Arlington started. "You can't mean—upon my word— Here, you damned rogue—"

It all happened in an instant. Kilgore caught the motion and leaped to intervene; he was too late. Arlington sensed the threat, too late. For swift as light, the man whipped out his sword and lunged, and lunged again.

Kilgore was upon him, only to meet a stunning blow between the eyes from the pommel of that sword. It dropped him senseless.

When he was brought to himself, the box was jammed. The curtains had been dropped, shutting out the roaring crowd; he found Arlington asking for him, and stumbled to his knees beside the dying man. Arlington's fingers closed on his.

"Too bad, lad!" came the faint voice. "It's bitter irony—that she should destroy the dreams—that dreams—that dreams must perish like the sunlight! Good man, Kilgore; we might have gone far together—"

A cry burst from Kilgore, as the words failed, as the fingers within his relaxed. A cry of grief, of shock, of despair; and not for himself nor for his own hopes either, but for this man whose hopes and ambitions had been so much greater than his own, embracing all England—and now forever gone.

The lackey? He was never seen again; indeed, it was whispered that the Foul Fiend had taken the shape of that man in order to come and claim his own. Kilgore knew better, for if the lackey was gone, so was the mistress, and gone forever.

OFTEN and often, in days to follow, Arlington's words recurred to him. That dreams must perish like the sunlight—strange words! Everything was gone now; there was no other man in England with Arlington's vision, or the power to transmute it to reality. He and his future were gone too.

Yet from the bitterness of these lost things Kilgore had a richer and truer reward than comes to most dreamers. For during two whole days he had seen all his hopes and ambitions coming true, and their reality attested, and their worth recognized . . . even if they must perish like the sunlight.

Like the sunlight, indeed? But even for a dying man—does sunlight perish?

Another story in "The World Was Their Stage" appears in our November issue.

When the

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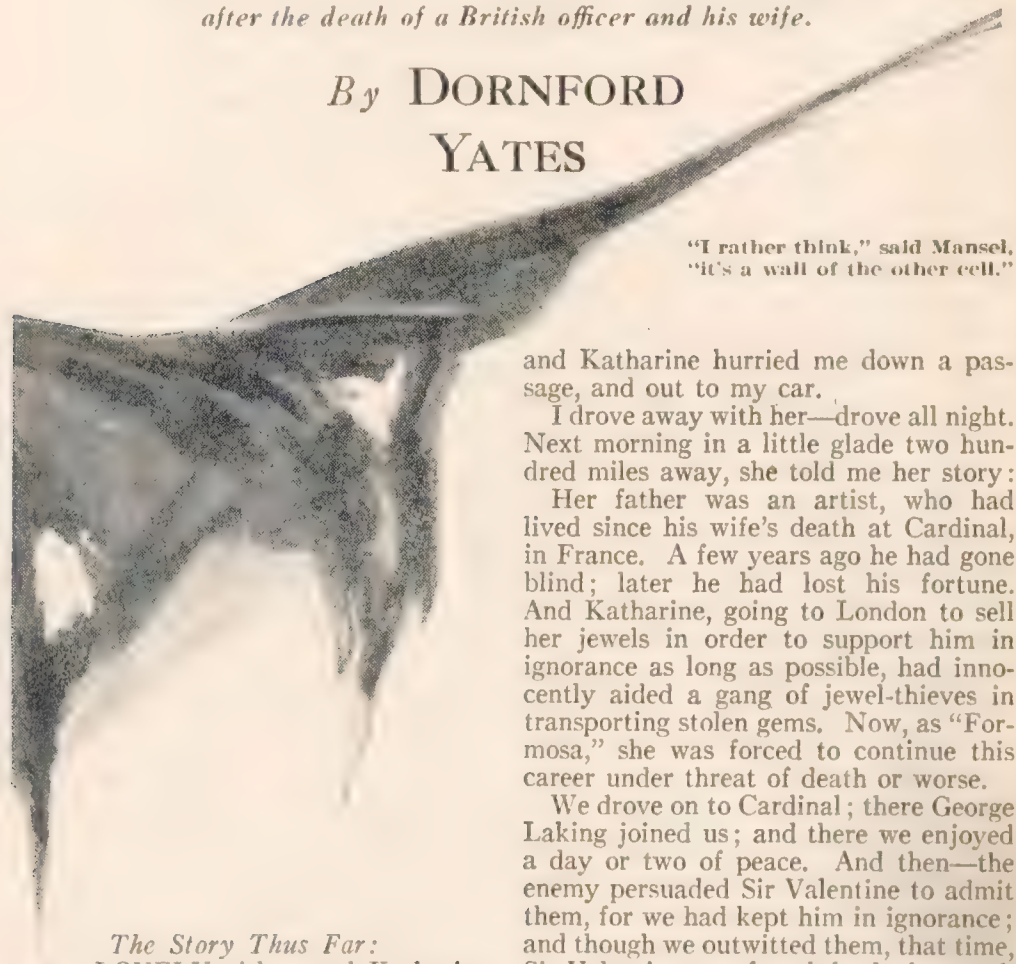
Devil Drives

The climax of a great novel which, while not a war story, is based on records which could only be made public after the death of a British officer and his wife.

By DORNFORD YATES



"I rather think," said Mansel, "it's a wall of the other cell."

The Story Thus Far:

A LOVELY girl named Katharine was my fellow-traveler on my way to a holiday motor-trip in France, that fateful summer of 1939. We were to meet next morning after the Channel crossing, but she gave me the slip. And George Laking, who was to share the trip, sent a message that he'd been delayed.

Killing time, I wandered that evening into a strange café, and there was Katharine sitting at a table with a group of evil-looking men.

I went over and spoke to her; she pretended not to recognize me; I insisted; and a first-class row was in the making when Katharine slipped away. Then the lights went out, a hand caught my elbow, and Katharine hurried me down a passage, and out to my car.

I drove away with her—drove all night. Next morning in a little glade two hundred miles away, she told me her story:

Her father was an artist, who had lived since his wife's death at Cardinal, in France. A few years ago he had gone blind; later he had lost his fortune. And Katharine, going to London to sell her jewels in order to support him in ignorance as long as possible, had innocently aided a gang of jewel-thieves in transporting stolen gems. Now, as "Formosa," she was forced to continue this career under threat of death or worse.

We drove on to Cardinal; there George Laking joined us; and there we enjoyed a day or two of peace. And then—the enemy persuaded Sir Valentine to admit them, for we had kept him in ignorance; and though we outwitted them, that time, Sir Valentine was found dead afterward, from heart-failure.

It was the day after the funeral that the Shepherd struck again: during my absence killed a servant on guard and carried Katharine off. We pursued, and through the help of a secret service agent named Mansel learned that she was imprisoned in a barge on the Seine; thence she was to be shipped to the white-slave traffic in South America. . . . We found the boat; but while I was keeping watch on shore, a blow on the head knocked me out. *(The story continues in detail:)*

"HOW d'you feel?" said Mansel. In the dark I could feel his arm about my shoulders, holding me up.

"Well, I'm still alive," I said, "but I've got the deuce of a head."

"That's hardly surprising," said Mansel. "You've been out for three hours."

SLOWLY I looked about me, blinking my eyes. It must be broad daylight, if I had been out for three hours.

"I don't want to be silly," I said, "but I seem to have lost my sight."

"No, you haven't," said Mansel. "At first I thought the same. But we're in a dark room—that's all."

"My God!" I said. "Don't say you bought it, too!"

"I did indeed," said Mansel. "And I'm greatly ashamed of myself. I never remember making so bad a mistake."

I sat very still. "Can you tell me what's happened?" I said. "I—I don't understand."

"What's the last thing you recall?"

I put a hand to my head, which was aching as never before.

"George and Carson," I said, "went off for the Rolls: and then you went down below to see how Mangey was getting on with his job."

"Very good," said Mansel. "And now I'll put you wise. The mistake which I made was this: *From first to last, I assumed that Mangey was alone.* Don't ask me why I did it, because I've no answer to give. The fact remains—I did it. And as a result, you and I have gone down the drain. We sha'n't stay down, you know. To be beaten by Mangey, is quite unthinkable. But at the present moment he's got us where we belong.

"What happened was this: When I let him go down alone, he went straight to another cabin and roused a pal: and since the cabins have portholes, the two saw George and Carson going ashore. By the time I came down, the pal was ready and waiting, and whilst I was speaking to Mangey, he laid me out. Then one of them went on deck and dealt with you."

"But what's his object?" said I. "The only chance he'd got was to stick to you."

"He means to do better than that. He knew that it was my intention to take the Shepherd on: but he didn't think I was up to the Shepherd's weight. If I took the Shepherd on, and the Shepherd won, Mangey's last state would be very much worse than his first; and so, if he could, he determined to turn his coat. And this, as we know, I gave him the chance to do.

"If and when the Shepherd appears, he's going to say we killed Judas and forced him (Mangey) to tell the tale which he did. And then he will hand us over—as proof of his devotion to the Shepherd and all his works."

"I'm all against that," said I.

"So," said Mansel, "am I. And as soon as you feel yourself, we'll have a look round. They've taken our pistols, of course; but they missed the torch. I'm not using it now, because I want to save it as much as I can."

"One moment," I said. "Has Mangey gone to the crossroads, to tell Satan what he's done?"

"Well, I hope he hasn't," said Mansel. "I daren't say more than that. Because, if he has, the Shepherd won't wait till tonight. But I think that perhaps he's not gone, because he's afraid of encountering Carson and George. Be careful when you stand up, or you'll hit your head."

With an effort, I got to my feet—to find the ceiling so low that I had to stoop.

"And now, where are we?" I said.

"Ah," said Mansel. "I wondered when that was coming. But I won't be beaten by Mangey. We're going to get out."

"Go on," I said. "Where are we?"

"In one of the padded cells."

THE position was ugly—we both knew that. And if Mangey had gone to the crossroads, we were as good as done. If he had not, we had perhaps fifteen hours in which to make our escape; but cells are not made to break out of, and the life of the torch could hardly be more than three hours. Yet, if we failed to break out, the game was up, for the Shepherd would take no chances and neither of us was armed. In that case, Katharine's rescue would hang upon Carson and George—who would be greatly embarrassed in any efforts they made; for the Shepherd would know what had happened, but they would not. As like as not, trying to find us, the two would play into his hands.

Our greatest hope was this: that George or Carson or both would very soon return to make their report, and that when the day wore on, but neither of us appeared, they would become suspicious and come aboard. If they put the screw on Mangey, he might give in: but in any event they would know that things had gone wrong and so would be forewarned when the Shepherd appeared.

Meanwhile, it was up to us to do what we could to escape without any help. But when Mansel had lighted the torch and I saw what our prison was like, I must confess that my heart sank.

The cell was six feet square and five feet six inches high, and the whole was lined with sailcloth, ceiling and walls and floor. There was no porthole or grating or anything of the kind, but the door was plain to be seen, because of the cut in the sailcloth, four feet by two. I need hardly say that it had no handle. There was no furniture and not so much as a bracket which we could tear from its fastenings, to use as a tool. The sailcloth itself was neither strained nor slack, so that, while it would give to violence, it could not be taken hold of at any point: and though it was very dirty, it showed no sign of disorder or even of wear.

What, of course, I could not see, but afterward found, was that there were four layers of sailcloth all over the cell; that the walls were padded with sawdust, but not the roof: that the cloth was held to the walls by straps of iron, which were themselves padded and covered, so that they did not appear.

Now, though the heat was dreadful, there could be no doubt at all that somewhere or other there was an inlet for air: but though we tried to find this, by prodding the cloth all over, to see if it gave, the stuff was so harsh that we met with no success. This insignificant effort was more than enough to set us streaming with sweat, and before we did anything else we stripped to the waist.

"And now," said Mansel, "I will tell you what I propose. In case we cannot get out before the Shepherd arrives, unless we are content to be butchered,—and I am not,—we had better make some preparation to put up some sort of fight. If we can detach the sailcloth above our heads—detach it on every side except that of the door, it will then hang down like a curtain against the wall. Then, when they open the door, they will at least be prevented from seeing into the cell—and you can't brush sailcloth aside as if it were silk. And once the stuff is down, there may be something above it which helps our case."

With that, to my great delight, he produced a three-bladed pen-knife out of a little pocket, sunk in the side of his coat, and whilst I held the torch, he made the first incision that expanse of sailcloth had ever known.

HE had to go carefully, for the sailcloth was tough, but after a minute or two he had slit the first layer across from side to side—this, right up in the angle which the ceiling made with the wall. Then, turning first right and then left, he slit it for two or three inches toward the door: and then we took hold of the tab which was now hanging down and, pulling together, ripped it the rest of the way.

With the other three layers of sailcloth we did the same, so that soon all four were hanging down over the door: since all were held fast at the top and dragged on the floor, they made a more awkward obstruction than we had dared hope they would; and I think that we both felt better when this was done. At least, I know I did; for now we should have some warning of danger at hand, and the door could not open upon us without warning.

And something else we gained by what we had done, for we had uncovered two vents which gave to the open air. These holes were admitting no daylight, and to this day I do not know where they led: but by putting our faces against them, we, so to speak, drank air from them.

The ceiling was built of hardwood and seemed to be stout, so we wasted no time upon that, but turned to the business of stripping the walls of the cell: but we did not touch the wall which was facing the door, because it seemed so likely that that was in fact the very side of the ship.

Here perhaps I should say that, whilst I was still unconscious, Mansel had done his utmost to force the door: but this he had found so fast that it might have been a part of the wall.

IT took us just half an hour to strip the three walls; and for all the good that we did, we might have left them alone, for all their seams were calked, and though they were built of timber, this was so tough that they might have been built of iron.

To strip the wall in which the door had been hung, we had to work under the curtain which we had made, and this was most exhausting, because we were there deprived of what air there was.

Our lungs were laboring—and were losing half their labor, much as a slipping clutch: the sweat was pouring off us and streaming into our eyes; and we were covered with sawdust from head to foot. Of this filth the chamber was full, and since our skins were so greasy, the stuff had only to touch them to stay where it was. It clung to our lips and our nostrils, so that we breathed it in, and, what was almost worse, it settled upon our eyelids and made its way into our eyes. What with this, and the lack of air and

the savage pain in my head, I began to feel that I simply could not go on and that death itself would be better than striving against such odds. But Mansel ignored all the torment as though it did not exist, except that he once observed that, whenever we left the cell, we must remember to take our jackets and shirts. "For if we don't," he said, "we shall both catch cold; and if there's one thing I hate, it is a cold in the head." This put me to shame, as perhaps it was meant to do, and I turned again to the battle he seemed determined to win.

We then attacked the one remaining wall, that is to say, the wall which was facing the door. When this was stripped, we found that it was not, as we had ex-

We saw no one on deck: we let ourselves

pected, the side of the ship itself, but was built of wood like the others, except that the wood was soft wood and none of the seams was caulked.

It was not match-boarding—it was stouter than that: but if we had had a cold chisel, we could, I was sure, have forced it without any fuss. But of course we had no chisel: and though we did our utmost to wrench from its fastenings one of the iron straps, we could not get our fingers behind it and so had to let it be.

But Mansel would not give in. He chose a joint in the woodwork, more open

into the water with scarcely a sound.

Mansel pursed his lips.

"I rather think," he said, "it's a wall of the other cell."

Once again my heart sank down. To have a faint hope of breaking out of prison is good: but when the only way out will bring you into another as strong as the one you are in, hope is mocked.

Mansel shook the sweat from his eyes and bade me put out the torch.

"D'you remember Jack Sheppard?" he said. "How he broke out of Newgate the second time? Well, this is the way he did it, passing from cell to cell. He was in 'The Castle,' you know; and he didn't like the look of the door: so he broke from 'The Castle' into 'The Red Room' and forced that door instead. And that's what we're going to do. Stand by with that torch."

Working in turn, it took us more than an hour to pare away enough wood for a man to get his fingers behind a board, and by the time we had done, the knife-blades were growing blunt.

than some, and began to make this wider by paring the edges away. It was a very slow business; but by using his sharpest blade, he gradually widened the joint, until sawdust began to fall through.

"Good Lord!" said I, "do they use nothing else in this ship?"

Now the slit we had managed to cut was three feet from the floor, so I went down on my knees, with my back to the wall, and Mansel took his seat on my shoulders, put his right hand into the hole and took a grip on the board. Then he planted his feet on the boards upon either side and bracing his wrist with his left hand, put forth his strength.

But the wood was just too thick. And when he threw in his hand, and I took his place, I could feel it bending before me, but that was all.

"Two grip-holes," said Mansel quietly. "That's what we want. But, first, we'll make this one bigger, and try and have a look at that cell. At least, we've plenty of time, for if Mangey had gone to the crossroads, your friend would have been here by now."

"What time is it?" said I.

"Just half-past seven."

I HAVE not mentioned two things which tried us extremely hard. One was the fact we could not stand upright, but always had to be stooping, for fear of hitting our heads. This, as was only natural, we often did, and so piled Ossa on Pelion, because our headaches required no stimulant. But worse than this was the thirst, which the heat and our perspiration jointly induced. Indeed, we were dripping without and parched within, and when I thought of the liquor which I had consumed in two evenings, yet did not desire, I felt as a spendthrift does who has fallen on evil days. And I thought of the rich man in hell, who pleaded that a beggar he knew might dip his finger in water and touch the tip of his tongue.

It did not take us so long to widen the hole enough to admit the torch: but it was a ticklish business cutting the canvas away—the sailcloth, I mean, on the other side of the boards; for the sawdust kept falling down and we could not see what we were doing or what we had done. For fear of dropping the knife, we fastened it to a shoe-lace and tied this round the finger of whoever was doing the work: but in fact we never did drop it.

When at last we had cut out three sides of a very small square, I put my forefinger through and held back the flap we had made, and Mansel put the torch through the opening and tried to look along it, between the torch and my hand: but before he could see at all, the sawdust closed in, and we had to spend ten good minutes raking out with our fingers what seemed to be a never-failing supply.

At last the source of this filth seemed to dwindle and presently fail, so again I held back the small flap and Mansel peered into the cell. We had made the hole big enough for him to swivel the torch, and as he threw its beam round, he reported what he could see.

"There's the door. It looks like ours, except that it's got a small cut, I see. That's for someone to look through, to see that the prisoner's all right. At least, we've been spared that attention. Hullo, there's a looking-glass, stuck up on a chair: with a couple of branches for candles—and candle-ends in them, by Jove! And there's a mattress and blankets. Solan, my boy, the place has been used as a bedroom. And there's a pair of girl's shoes. They must be Daisy's. That's right. After she'd run from Paris, this is where she lay up. I do hope the weather was cooler. Still, any port in a storm. . . . Half a shake. There's something this side of the cell, but I can't quite see what it is. The mirror's reflecting it: but if I'm to see what it is, I must keep the beam off the glass: and if I keep the beam off the glass, I can't see the glass myself. . . . No, I can't do it. We'll have to try something else."

With that, he sat back on his heels, and I let the flap go.

He took the shoe-lace from the knife and tied it about the torch: the other end he tied to his finger, and while he was doing this, he spoke very quietly, as though he were thinking aloud.

"There's something down on the floor, on the other side of this wall—some gear of sorts. It may be worth nothing to us. And yet—I've a definite feeling that we should see what it is. So I'm going to push the torch through and let it hang down the wall. Its beam will fall onto this gear: and then I can look at the mirror and see what it is. And now I'm ready; so put your finger through and hold back that flap."

NOW to lose the torch was as bad as losing the knife, and I must confess that while Mansel was guiding it through the hole we had cut and then releasing it gently, to let it hang down, I felt quite sick with fear lest we never should see it again.

Mansel had his eye to the hole. . . .

"Tools," he said quietly. "Try and believe me, Solan, for as we're alive, it's true. I believe it's a cracksman's out-

fit—I can see a brace and some bits. Yes, it is. There's a jimmy, Solan. Leaning against the wall. A perfect beauty: the very thing that we want. And now, of course, I see. . . . This cell is Mangey's spare room. It's no more and no less than a harbor—where Mangey conceals odd friends who have got to lie low. And one of these was his daughter—I've seen her shoes. And another, my son, was a burglar—who's left his tools with Mangey, until he needs them again."

"But they're out of our reach," said I.

"They won't be for long," said Mansel. "The top of that jimmy's about a foot from our hole."

WITH that, he pulled up the torch and began to wheedle it backward into the hole we had made, when, as though to spite us, a landslide of sawdust took place, altogether blocking the passage and cutting us off from the torch.

Though I worked as hard as I dared, it took me a quarter of an hour to clear this obstruction away, for of course, as fast as I picked the stuff out of the hole, its place was taken by dust which was waiting to fall. All this time the torch was burning and wasting its precious light.

And then at last, as before, the fall of sawdust gradually slackened and died, and one minute later Mansel had the torch in his hand. I saw him glance at its lens; then he peeled the shoe-lace off it and gave it to me. As he picked up the knife—

"We must widen this hole," he said, "until we can get an arm through. Up to the elbow will do. And then we shall have that jimmy, and then, by God, we'll get out."

That was as much as he said, before falling to work: but, since I had eyes in my head, I knew as well as did he that the torch was beginning to fail. I had to hold it closer and closer, for him to see how to pare the woodwork away....

When its light was very dim, he stopped his cutting a moment, to draw a line on the wood with the point of a blade—a roughly semicircular line, containing the hole we had made: and then he cut a series of notches along this line, so that, though we had no light, we should know which way we were cutting and how far we had to go.

Then he handed the knife to me, while he took the torch. But almost at once the light went out.

Many people may think that, since our task was so simple and only laborious, it could make but little difference whether or no we had the use of our eyes. I can only say in reply that the very simplest labor, to be performed in the dark, not only calls for a cunning which only the blind possess, but sometimes strains the nerves to the breaking-point.

There can be no doubt at all that we should have taken far longer, but for the series of notches which Mansel had had the foresight to cut on the wood; for whatever else went wrong, we always had these to work for, and they of course told us our progress as nothing else could have done.

Four hours and a half it took us to cut that woodwork away. But it might have been one or twenty, for all I knew. I had lost all sense of time. And when at last Mansel breathed, "My arm will go through," I only said, "Give it to me," and put out my hand for the knife. Instead, he put the jimmy into my hand.

I am ashamed to say that, when I found out what it was, I very near burst into tears: and since I dared not speak, I found Mansel's hand and shook it; and he clapped me upon the back.

"And now," he said, "I propose to break into the other cell. It may seem the long way round, because I'm perfectly sure that we can break out of this. But we cannot break out of this, without making the deuce of a noise, while the other cell has that shutter—that little trap in the door. We ought to be able to force that quietly enough: and then if we put out an arm, we may find a bar or a bolt which we can undo. Then again, if Mangey does come, we may as well both be armed. And we know there's a brace in there. . . . I don't say a brace is handy, but it's better than nothing."

The jimmy was like a small crowbar, and five minutes later we entered the other cell. Mansel was stooping beside me, and I heard the clink of steel. And then he put the jimmy into my hand.

"I've found another," he said; "rather lighter than this. It'll suit that shutter better, if I know anything."

THOUGH I could not see how he worked, he made very little noise, and after two or three minutes, he led my hand up to where the shutter had hung.

At once I put out my arm, to feel for a bolt.

"Put your arm down," said Mansel. "I don't think these doors are bolted—I think they're barred. I don't think they've got any hinges; I think rather they are really panels, which you lift in and out of place."

God knows how he knew, but he was perfectly right. Passing my hand down the door, I came to a flat iron bar, some three inches wide.

I told him what I had found.

"Can you get your fingers beneath it? One end is probably free, while the other turns on a pin."

He was right again. The bar was so fixed that, when its free end was lifted, it moved like the hand of a clock. I lifted the free end up, withdrawing my arm as it rose: and when it came to the peephole, I put in my other hand and swung it the rest of the way.

"I think the door's free," said I.

"Then hold it up by the peephole, and ease it out with your knees."

When I did as he said, the door began to give way, and I felt its weight on my hands. I let it gradually down, and after perhaps three inches it came to rest.

"Splendid!" breathed Mansel. "Now lift it into the cell and prop it against the wall."

Again I did as he said.

"And now stand by. I'm going to have a look-round."

With that, he stepped over the sill.

Nearly a minute went by; all the time I could hear him moving, quite close to the door.

Then I heard his voice again:

"Listen," he said. "This place is a square-shaped well, about seven feet deep. We are at the bottom of this: and directly in front of the door is a ladder of iron rungs. I can only assume that this leads to a trap of sorts. So I'm going up, to get my shoulders beneath it and see if it gives. Take these things"—he gave me our jackets and shirts—"and stay directly behind me, keeping a hand on my heel."

As Mansel turned to the ladder, I stepped over the sill: then I put out my hand, as arranged, to take hold of his heel. But I never got so far; for I was still groping, when the ceiling began to open and then to swing back and away, and there was the blessed daylight, to dazzle my thankful eyes.

I saw Mansel hanging above me and looking all round. Then he whipped up and off the ladder and helped me out of the trap—and into the dingy saloon.

In fact, the ladder ran up beneath one of the seats or divans, surrounding that seedy room. These were tilted backward against the side of the ship. But a section of one of these sofas was made to rise up and fall forward away from the wall; and when Mansel put pressure upon it, standing below, that section immediately yielded, cushions and all, and swung out of the way on its hinges.

I think there can be no doubt that the cell into which we were thrown was approached in a similar way; and that had we examined the seats on the opposite side of the saloon, we should have found a section, hidden and cut and hinged as was the one we had moved.

The saloon was empty, and we could hear no sound.

"Drop the clothes," breathed Mansel; "and you keep watch while I cover the manhole up."

I stood with my eyes on the gangway, where Judas had died. . . . After a moment or two—

"All right," breathed Mansel. "Get on your shirt and jacket."

I saw that he had his on; and when I glanced at the sofas against the wall, their cushions were all in order and there was nothing to show that they had been moved.

I fought my way into my things. . . .

Without taking his eyes from the gangway, Mansel crooked his finger, and at once I stepped to his side.

"It hurts to leave Mangey," he said: "but I'd like to get ashore, if we can, without his knowing we're gone. I don't want to disturb his arrangements—for, now that we're out of the bill, they'll suit us down to the socks. And the Shepherd will probably kill him, when he finds that the cupboard is bare. And now tell me this—can you swim?"

I told him I could.

"Very well. I want to avoid that landing-stage, for the cabins command it; and though we get ashore, we shall not be able to tell whether we have been seen. But if there is no one on deck and we slip into the river on the other side, we can swim downstream a bit and then come ashore out of sight. Besides, I'd like a wash; and a plunge after all that sweating will close our pores."

So it was: We saw no one on deck; we let ourselves into the water with scarcely a sound, and ten minutes later we landed, just out of sight of the tender, some two hundred yards downstream.

I can never say how much I enjoyed that bathe—although I was bearing a jimmy which must have weighed fifteen pounds. After all the torture we had suffered, the lap of that lazy water did more than wash from our bodies the sawdust and sweat: and I know that I waded ashore, a different man. I must also confess that I drank as much as I could: and though, no doubt, it was tainted, I never felt any the worse.

WITHIN the forest, we stripped and wrung out our clothes: then we put on our trousers again and began to make our way back to the edge of the apron which served the landing-stage.

"Laking will be there," said Mansel. "What d'you bet he doesn't curse us for not appearing before?"

"He won't dare curse you," said I.

"I'm not so sure. As like as not, he's been waiting about eight hours."

This was true. It was now, we found, a quarter past three—of a beautiful afternoon.

Two minutes later, George rose out of a bush. He looked me up and down, with a hand to his chin. Then—

"Had a good bathe?" he said grimly, and Mansel began to laugh.

"I know," said George. "It's a scream. 'Mr. Solan will be close to the apron most of the time.' Well, I can prove that he hasn't been, for seven hours."

"He has a good excuse," said Mansel. "And now for your news."

"Oh, nothing much," said George. "We know where the Shepherd hangs out. And Carson has entered the house and located my lady's rooms."

Chapter Twelve

THE effect of the mind upon the body can be a remarkable thing. By every right in the world, Mansel and I should have been at the end of our tether—unable to take any action until we had rested or slept—for we had spent twelve hours in the padded cells: but our very escape restored the strength we had expended, and George's wonderful news made me feel like a giant refreshed.

Mansel was dealing with it before I had taken it in.

"This changes everything. I believe the Shepherd will come here at ten o'clock: but I very much doubt if he'll bring Formosa along; for he had fixed Tuesday morning, and I don't think he'll be disposed to let a rat like Mangey alter his date. But now this doesn't matter, for we shall be at his lodging when he moves off and we shall see for ourselves whether or no he takes Formosa along. If he does, we've only to follow. If he does not, we enter the lodging and free her and then sit down and wait for the Shepherd's return.

"And now for the Rolls and Rouen. We cannot spare the time now, but as soon as we're all in the car, we'll have Laking's tale."

"And what about yours?" said George.

"Ours can wait," said Mansel. "Suffice it that I made a mistake—which caused us great inconvenience for several hours. And that is why Solan was late: so you mustn't blame him. I needn't ask if Carson is watching the house."

"He was," said George, "some eight and a half hours ago."

"Then he still will be," smiled Mansel. "Where did you leave the Rolls?"

"I ventured to bring her nearer. She's not very far from the crossroads—say two miles off."

"Good for you," said Mansel.

Then he and I put on our shirts and our jackets—for the sake of any we met, as we went along: and he showed me how to carry a jimmy, between my armpit and knee. But he gave me the smaller one, and took the big one himself. And then we set out for the car as fast as we could, keeping at first to the trees, but

later using the track, which seemed as deserted by day as it had been by night.

As soon as we reached the Rolls, Mansel opened a secret locker and took two pistols out: offering me one.

Then he took the driver's seat, whilst George and I sank down in the cushions behind.

As he started the engine— "Out with it, Laking," he said. "Before we get to Rouen, I've got to know where I am."

"SATAN left the crossroads," began George, "about five o'clock, and passed us five minutes later, going all out. The roads were much more empty than Carson liked, but in fact this didn't matter, for, to judge from the way he drove, Satan's one idea was to make his report. He fairly beat Godolphin out of that car —there were times when I thought she'd take off and go up in the air!

"Well, as soon as we got to Rouen, he switched to the left and led us north by east to a quarter I didn't know. Carson did terribly well, as you said he would: we were practically always the length of a street behind. We were soon among private houses—roads, not streets—and halfway along one of these the saloon began to slow down. Carson had stopped in a flash and was out of the Rolls, and I took over the wheel, as Satan swung into the driveway of a house on the right.

"It seemed best to go on down the road: and as I went by the gateway, I saw Carson enter the drive.

"Well, I shoved the Rolls round a corner, a street or two off, and then I came back to the road, to have a look round.

"The house is one of a row, but it is detached. It stands well back from the road, as all of them do, with a high-walled garden in front and a garage in this garden, standing against the house."

Mansel put in his oar.

"If you were to stand in the gateway, what would you see?"

"An open, pebbled space, about fifty feet deep. After that, you come to the house, which is two stories high. On the right of the pebbled space is a well-grown, ill-kept shrubbery, ten feet thick. This has grown up above the wall against which it stands, and since the house next door has a shrubbery, too, you can't see the garden wall from either side. On the left of the pebbled space, first you have bushes again, and then the garage begins about twenty-five feet away. It is a double garage, built against the house and the garden wall."

"Right," said Mansel. "Go on."

"Well, after I'd walked by once, I thought I'd hover about at the end of the road—it was only just half-past five, and so there was no one about. Apparently I did the right thing, for after about twenty minutes I saw Carson strolling toward me, as if he had time to burn. I turned and walked back to the Rolls, and he followed me up.

"He'd whipped inside the garage while Satan was leaving the car: and while Satan was lowering the curtain, Carson had entered the house—by a door which leads from the garage into a sort of hall."

"How many cars?" said Mansel.

"One besides the saloon—a good-looking sportsman's coupé, painted black."

"Right. And then?"

"Satan flung up some back stairs and then through a door, so Carson followed him up and stood just behind the door which Satan hadn't quite shut. He saw him knock at and enter a room six paces away: but he didn't shut that door, either: he stood with his hand on it, talking, and Carson heard the word 'Willies,' and a man inside letting fly. And then another door opened, and a woman put out her head. She stood there listening a moment: then she walked into the passage and up to where Satan was. She left her door wide open, and Carson could see that it gave to a little hall. Carson put her down as an athlete—coarsely handsome and plainly immensely strong. She elbowed Satan aside and went into his master's room: but before she could get a word out, she was cursed to hell and further for *leaving her charge*.

"Well, that was enough for Carson. . . . He made his way back to the garage, where he knew that the curtain was lowered, but was not locked into place. So he raised it enough to crawl out, and then shoved it down again. And then he came to find me.

"Now it seemed to us quite likely that, now that he'd made his report, Satan would return to the crossroads to see if Judas was there: and it seemed to us equally likely that, if he was going back, he would go back at once. We, therefore, decided that I should wait awhile before pushing off, because our roads were the same and I didn't want him on my tail. Carson, of course, was to stay, in any event. In fact, he left at once—for the top of the garden wall. I waited till a quarter to seven, but as nothing had happened by then, I took the Rolls and set off. And by eight o'clock I was

by the edge of the apron as we had arranged.

"Well, that isn't quite all. When nearly two hours had gone by, but you didn't appear, I began to get uneasy and wonder if something was wrong. In fact, I was seriously thinking of going aboard, for the tender might have been an abandoned craft. And then a queer-looking fellow appeared on deck; he had a mop and a bucket and started swabbing the decks.

"I watched him for a while, then made my way into the forest and presently on to the tow-path a quarter of a mile up stream. Then I came sauntering down, and when I was nearing the apron, I hailed the tender in French. When the fellow appeared, I asked him where Mangey was. He asked what I wanted him for, and I said I'd got a message for Mangey himself. He offered to give it to him, but I wouldn't have that. 'You go and fetch Mangey,' I said. 'I know him by sight. But I've never seen you before, and I don't want to see you again.' He grinned at that, so I knew I was under his guard. 'Mangey's ashore,' he said. 'I don't know where he's gone, but he said he'd be back at five.' And so I sheered off up the tow-path, the way I'd apparently come; for I knew if Mangey was gone, then you were gone too."

Mansel laughed. Then—

"'For everywhere that *Mangey* went, the *lambs* were bound to go.' Mangey got bored with his lambs. So he didn't take them with him, but shut them up in their pen before going ashore."

"Oh, I don't believe it," said George. "You're having me on."

"I wish I was," said Mansel. "And now here's Rouen coming. Tell me which way to go."

So we came to the district in which my darling was lodged.

AS we were both known by sight to the Shepherd's gang, George and I stayed in the Rolls, while Mansel strolled past the house, to let Carson know we were there.

In five minutes' time he was back. He put his head in at the window and spoke to George.

"Is this where you berthed this morning?"

"Yes," said George, wide-eyed.

"And Carson knows that?"

"Yes."

"Very good. We can only sit tight. Both cars are out of the garage, and Carson has gone from the wall."

This news was a terrible blow; for all of us knew very well that Carson would never have left his post on the wall, unless my lady had been in one of the cars. That he had endeavored to follow, we had no doubt: but how could a man on foot keep a car in sight? The thing was out of the question. In traffic he might be able to trail it a little way: but in such a district as this a car would get a clear run. And there were no taxi-ranks.

THAT the Shepherd had left with Katharine could mean but one thing—the man had changed his plans, because of Judas' failure to reappear. As I have shown, we had been afraid of this: but we had only feared that he might not fall into our trap: it had never entered our heads that he would leave his lodging and carry my lady with him, out of our ken. For that was what he had done. That he had not left for the tender was painfully clear; for even now it was only half-past four, and had he been bound for the tender, he would not have left before dusk. But, apart from where he had gone, we could not think why he had gone; for he could have no reason to think that we knew his address.

The more we went over the ground, the more uneasy we grew. . . .

There was one explanation—a very good explanation of why the Shepherd had gone: but though it occurred to us all, none of us put it forward and each of us tried to thrust it out of his mind. And that was this: that Carson had been discovered—up on the wall.

Sitting well back in the Rolls, I stared through the dusty windscreen and down the suburban road, cursing our bitter fortune and praying for Mangey's death.

We had picked up our pilot, Mansel, and he had steered us into the harbor's mouth: and there, in the moment of triumph, we had gone aground on a shoal which was not on the map: *Mangey*. Before Mangey murdered Judas, we had had the game in our hands: and by his murder of Judas, the game had been lost. And, after that, Mansel had saved it—snatched victory out of defeat. And once again Mangey had torn it—by putting us out of action during those vital hours: for if I had been close to the apron when George had arrived, Carson would have been reinforced by a quarter to nine.

I put my head in my hands—and tried very hard to believe that we were not back where we had been two days before.

"Look at it this way," said George. "What were the Shepherd's reactions to Satan's report? His first was sheer amazement that you and I should have got as far as we had. You and I had actually spotted the tender and were making a clumsy effort to get aboard. His second was sharp annoyance that Judas had tried to find us instead of holding his hand until ten tonight. His third was a shrewd suspicion that we had got Judas down.

"Now, if I am right, he was forced to swallow this truth—that we were a sight more efficient than he had supposed and that if we could spot the tender and then

"Take Mabel up," said Mansel. "I'll bring Formosa."

get Judas down, it was well on the cards that we'd followed Satan home. 'Well, that doesn't matter,' he says. 'Let them come up here and meet it. I'll put them where they belong. But, if they don't, and I'm to go out tonight—well, I can't leave Formosa here. I'm not going to take her with me—I don't want her on in this act. So I'll take her away and shove her in some safe place, and then I'll go down to the tender at ten o'clock'."

"You think he'll be there?" said I.

"Yes, I do," said George. "He'll be on the tips of his toes, but I think he'll be there. He'll never suspect the story which Mangey told. According to that,

we shall be there at half-past ten. And he wants you worse than ever, in view of what has occurred."

"Well, I think you're wrong," said I, "but I hope you're right. All I want is a chance to twist his block from his trunk. And if anyone kills him first, I'll break his neck."

With that, I lifted my head, to look for the twentieth time at the clock in the dash; for, after the frantic action which I had taken that day, to have to sit still in a car, much as a paid companion whose mistress is paying a call, was straining my patience almost to breaking-point.

Of such poor stuff are we made. Three hours ago, I would have sold my soul to be sitting back in the Rolls, with the blessed air in my lungs and the sunlight filling my eyes: but now that was all forgotten, and I was chafing like a madman, because I was forced to sit still and to take my ease. Perhaps I may be forgiven. Three times in the last fifteen hours my hopes had been raised sky-high —and then dashed to hell. Such usage does not bring out the best in a man.

Once more I sat back, with my eyes on the sunlit road.

Mansel was not to be seen. He was, presumably, moving between the house and the Rolls, and keeping them both in view, so far as he could. The district was unfrequented. One or two nursemaids with children had passed us by, and a van delivered some parcel three houses away: three times a car had swept the length of the road, and another was standing empty a little way off: and except for two or three cyclists, I think that was all. The world went very quietly in the Avenue Lannemezan.

I began to count the trees on the opposite side of the road.

ANOTHER car appeared, coming in our direction and moving leisurely. Its appearance upset my counting, and I began again. One, two, three—

And there I heard George catch his breath.

"God Almighty," he said. "It's the small saloon!"

There was no time to warn Mansel.

All we could do was sit well back in the Rolls . . . and pray that whoever was driving saw nothing strange in the fact that a Rolls-Royce with English numbers was standing, waiting, two hundred yards from his house.

And then, to my consternation, the saloon began to turn in to our side of the road. I watched it coming nearer and nearer, drawing up to the pavement, only a short six paces ahead. . . . But I could not see who was driving, for the flicker of sunlight and shadow upon the screen.

I SLID my hand on to my pistol and pushed back the safety-catch. My tail had been twisted enough — whoever looked into the Rolls would open his eyes in hell!

And there the door was opened—*and Carson got out.*

He glanced up and down the pavement. Then he walked up to the Rolls and stood looking past the car, with a hand on its door.

I guessed that Mansel was coming, but I could not wait.

"Carson," I cried, "where is she? What d'you know?"

He never looked into the car, but I saw him smile.

"It's quite all right, sir," he said. "They're taking her down by water. We've plenty of time."

And as we drove the way we had come, we listened to Carson's tale.

"The first thing I knew, sir, the garage curtain goes up. That was just about a quarter to four. At once I slips off the wall and into the bushes below. Looking between the leaves, I saw Satan get into the coupé—not the saloon. Then he backed her out an' round, and I saw there was four inside. He brought her slowly round, with her back to the house; so from where I stood I could see right into the car. Beside him was sitting the woman I'd seen before; and a smooth-faced man with queer eyes was sitting behind with a lady—I couldn't see her very well, but I guessed who it was. As Satan stopped going back, he says something over his shoulder: and the man with the eyes says: 'Go by the race-course, of course, you fool.' And then they went off.

"Well, they'd left the curtain up, and there was the saloon: and they'd told me the way they were going, so I didn't waste any time.

"I very soon picked them up, an' I followed them down to the river by roundabout ways. They stopped beyond the city—upriver, I mean. Three miles up, I should say, toward Pont-de-l'Arche. A strange-looking place—I couldn't make out what it was. An' then I saw the boat-houses, four or five. It was really a sort of garage for motor-boats. I could see that they were expected, for a launch

was against the raft: they went straight down to this and I watched them aboard.

"This time I was able to see my lady plain. An' if you ask me, she was doped. The other had hold of her arm and was talking an' laughing and generally playing up: but she never spoke nor smiled, and I think she was dazed.

"They and the man with the eyes went into a sort of cabin, right up in the bows; and Satan went in with a suitcase and then came out and went aft. A fair-haired tough was there—he'd been holding the launch to the raft. An' Satan said something to him, and he started the engine up.

"An' then they went off downstream."

There was a little silence. The tale was done.

At the third attempt—

"Miss Katharine will thank you," I said, and felt ashamed of my voice.

"It was easy enough, sir," said Carson. "They played right into my hands."

NEARLY five hours had gone by. We had rested and broken our fast and made some purchases: the Rolls was now berthed by the crossroads, where George had concealed her before: and we were, all four, crouching beneath the landing-stage. We could not be seen from the tender, yet we could see the river both up and down; and since any craft which meant to run alongside would have to begin to sheer up some distance away, we could not possibly miss the approach of the launch.

Now we had with us fifty meters of very stout fishing-net; and it had been arranged that, as soon as the launch arrived, George and Carson should swim with this to her stern. And with this they would foul her screw. The deed could be done in silence, yet most effectually; for once the propeller was swathed with tackle like that, a dozen revolutions would bring her work to an end—which meant that the launch would be helpless and could not so much as be steered.

Whilst they were doing this, Mansel and I were to make our way on to the tender as best we could: this we expected to do without being seen, for though Mangey or one of his people was almost certainly watching the landing-stage, the arrival of the launch would distract them and they would leave at once for the opposite side of the deck.

When they had done their business of fouling the screw, George and Carson would return to the landing-stage, but this time approach the tender, still moving beneath the foot-boards and so out of sight. In this way they would be able to look through the portholes which served the dingy saloon, and on what they saw take place there, their action would then depend.

THIS was the best we could do; for we had no idea at all what line the Shepherd would take, and though we should have preferred to be aboard the tender before the launch came alongside, we dared not risk being seen by the man who proposed to deliver us into the Shepherd's hands.

"In fact," said Mansel, "the time for taking risks is over and gone. That is a luxury which we cannot afford tonight. For one thing, Judas' disappearance has whetted the Shepherd's suspicion as nothing else could have done: and when such a man is suspicious, he fires at sight. Then again, before the night's out, I very much hope that he'll have his back to the wall: but when such a man perceives that he has his back to the wall—well, he's just about as safe as a viper that's short of her young."

That was as much as he said: but I think we all knew that he meant that we had our work cut out, if we were to make this omelet without the breaking of eggs.

Here perhaps I should say that we do not know to this day whether the Shepherd was proposing to dispose of my lady that night or whether he had brought her merely because he desired to have her under his hand: but I think the truth is this—that he meant to put her aboard and have done with the thing, provided that he was first able to put George and me to death. The fact that he came down by water, instead of by road, proves, I think, that what Mansel said was true—that Judas' disappearance had shaken him up and that though he could not believe that two "Willies" could stand against him, he was determined to take no chances at all.

Night had fallen by now, and the moon was not due to rise for another two hours; but craft could not move upon the river without their lights and these disclosed their position and sometimes more than that. Since the weather was fine and hot, more than one launch went by with a phonograph playing and a searchlight flooding its path, but though bigger vessels passed us, well out in the

stream, the night was so dark that we could not see what they were. And then, at last, at about a quarter to ten, we saw twin green and red lights bearing very slowly toward us and moving down stream. They must have been still a hundred and fifty yards off, when a searchlight leaped out of the darkness to rake the stage and the tender for less than three seconds of time: then all was dark again, and only the green light was left, to show where some craft was moving close to the bank. No engine was running. The launch which was approaching was drifting—drifting very slowly down to the tender's side.

I do not know who was steering, but he must have had eyes like a cat, and he must have been a nice helmsman, for the launch was moving so slowly that she must just have had steerage-way. Be that as it may, he brought her very gently right alongside, and we saw her shape distinctly before she passed out of our sight—for, when she came to rest, the bulk of the tender concealed her from anyone still ashore.

Till this moment we had not been sure that anyone on the tender was looking out: but though we had never seen him, Mangey must have been sitting somewhere on deck, for we heard him start up and then call down the companion—no doubt to the Spaniard whom George had seen swabbing the decks.

"Stand by below," he said. "There's a craft alongside."

"Off you go," breathed Mansel, to Carson and George.

The two slipped into the water.

(Perhaps I should have said that they were already stripped, but that, lest the the white of their bodies should catch some inquisitive eye, they had wrapped the net about them from shoulder to toe. They had, therefore, nothing to do but to let the net slip from their bodies into the crook of their arms and then to enter the water and make for the launch.)

"Come," breathed Mansel, to me.

"Excuse me," Mansel said—and took the Shepherd by the neck. To seize his wrists then, was not difficult.

As we reached the side of the tender, I heard Mangey speak again.

"You, is it?" he said. "I thought—"

"Damn your thoughts," said Satan. "Where's Bright Boy gone?"

"How should I know?" said Mangey. "I tol' you—"

"I'll say you did," said Satan. "An' now you can tell His Nibs. An' where's the Willies you promised, you damned murderer?"

There was a little silence. Then—

"I'll tell His Nibs," said Mangey, calmly enough.

As the two turned to the launch, Mansel and I whipped over the tender's rail and onto her deck.

NOW I had expected that Mangey would tell the Shepherd the truth—always excepting the truth about Judas' death. In other words, I had thought he would simply relate how he had been forced by Mansel to tell the tale that he did and how he had caught us both bending and thrown us into the cell. But, though he may have meant to, he decided to play for safety and tell the Shepherd a lie. I shall always think the truth is that Satan's epithet *"murderer"* shook him and made him afraid to confess that the tale he had told to Satan was all untrue. Be that as it may, he actually stuck to that tale, declaring with oath after oath that "the Willies" had gone off down stream and the last he had seen of Judas was his "slidin' off in their wake."

All this he said kneeling down on the tender's deck, to bring his head down to the Shepherd's, who stood in the launch below, while Satan squatted beside him, but held his tongue. The two did not lower their voices—which could not, of course, have been heard from the landing-stage: they could hardly be expected to know that Mansel and I were standing four paces away.

"YOU'RE lying, Mangey," said the Shepherd. "You've seen the Willies all right: but they didn't put Judy out."

"I don't say they did," said Mangey. "But now you come to mention it, what made the Willies come back?"

"'The Willies come back'?" snapped the Shepherd. "What d'you mean?"

"What I say," said Mangey. "The two came back this morning at break o' day. I was jus' goin' ashore, when I see them down the tow-path, comin' upstream. Digs was aboard by then, so I slid below and told him to watch his step. I marked 'em through a porthole, whispering together an' tiptoeing along the stage. I guess they thought I'd turned in, and they meant to board the hooker an' stow away. Well, so they did—but not the way they intended. Talk about a fair cop!"

"D'you mean," said the Shepherd, slowly, "that you've got them here?"

"That's right, sir," said Mangey. "We got them down between us and shoved 'em in one o' the cells. We took their guns, an', what with no water this weather, they won't be up to much: so if you'd like to see them. . . . I mean, perhaps they'll tell you where Bright Boy is."

Such was the tale Mangey told. It had one obvious flaw—that it was Mansel, not George, who had been rendered senseless and thrown with me into the cell. But Mangey could weather that, by saying the light was dim when we came aboard. But if it had one flaw, it had one shining virtue—from our point of view: for it did not disclose to the Shepherd that most important fact *that there were arrayed against him not two, but four.* Mangey knew this. For that very reason, this evening, he had been watching the shore. But now he could watch it no longer, because, if his tale was true, the only "Willies" there were were down in the cell.

So Mangey betrayed the Shepherd—by seeking to save himself.

Before two minutes had passed, the launch had been made fast to the tender's side, and the Shepherd and both of his men had followed Mangey into the small saloon. And Digs was below already. Five rats in the self-same trap.

Chapter Thirteen

"GET the others aboard," said Mansel. In less than thirty seconds, George and Carson were there.

"Mr. Solan and I," said Mansel, "are going aboard the launch. You two will watch the companion. Lay out whoever comes up. If you kill him, it doesn't matter; but try not to shoot."

Then we left them, armed with the jimmies, and boarded the launch.

Mansel entered the cabin, and taking a torch from his pocket, directed its beam to the floor. Katharine was sitting upright, with her hands in her lap. She looked very pale and weary, and her air was that of one who has shot his bolt. She did not look desperate. She gave the impression that something within her was broken, that though her flesh was alive, her spirit was dead.

She did not move at our entrance, or shift her gaze, but sat staring straight before her, as though she were all alone; but the woman beside her started and let out a gasp.

"Well, Mabel," said Mansel shortly, "isn't this nice? And I thought you were working for Rudy! An' this is Formosa, is it? Well, well, she's had a good run, but it's our day out." He jerked his head at the tender. "Up you go, my girls. I've got a van in the woods."

Her eyes like saucers, the woman whom he had called Mabel opened her mouth.

"An English busy, by God!"

"An English busy," said Mansel, "lent to the Rouen police. Come on, look sharp, you two! You're not the only peas in the pod tonight."

The woman got to her feet; but Katharine sat fast.

"An' none of the rough stuff, Mabel. I've got two platinum bracelets, in case you feel like that."

Mabel's reply was unprintable, but Mansel only grinned. Then he turned to Katharine.

"Come on, Formosa," he said. He put his arm about her and raised her up. "She don't look too grand," he added, turning to me. "Take Mabel up. I'll bring Formosa along."

I fell in behind the woman, now in the cabin's entrance.

As I bent my head to follow, she hit me full in the face, and before I had got my balance, had leaped onto one of the seats and dived into the Seine.

"Glory be!" said Mansel. "I prayed for that. Onto the tender, my lad, and I'll hand you up my lady."

A moment later Katharine was in my arms.

"Esau, Esau!" she whispered.

I bent my head, to set my cheek against hers.

"My blessed Kate . . . my darling! From the power of the dog!"

"Oh, Esau, I can't believe it."

"You've had a bad dream, my sweet; but now you're awake. Here's George, by your side, to tell you we're out of the wood."

Mansel was speaking again.

"Someone must take her into the forest at once. And stay there with her, till we've finished this business off. I can't spare Carson, so one of you two must go."

I gave my burden to George, and took his jimmy away.

"It's up to you," I said. "I've someone to—see."

"Well, give him my love," said George. "You know what I mean."

"Here's her suitcase," said Mansel.

"Esau, Esau!" My lady had hold of my coat.

"A little minute, my darling. We're almost through. You will sit in the forest with George, until I come."

"I know. I heard what was said. But for God's sake, be careful, Esau! He knows that Judas is dead, and he's lost control. I've seen him angry before, but never like this."

As we moved to the tender's side—

"We have him cold, Katharine. And George will tell you that Mansel is more than up to his weight."

I saw them over the rail and onto the landing-stage; then I joined Mansel and Carson at the companion-hatch.

Mansel was flat on his face, peering down the stairway into the grim saloon. So I lay down beside him, to see and hear what I could.

BUT the five had not got very far. One hidden trap was open—the fellow to that by which Mansel and I had emerged; and the Shepherd, Satan and Digs were standing round about it, as

men stand round the lair of some beast which they hope to bolt. The Shepherd was holding a torch and throwing its beam on the ceiling, to light the scene. A glow of sorts was rising out of the trap, and as we were soon to learn, the others were down below.

The Shepherd was growing impatient.

"Larry!" he snapped.

A head appeared in the trap—the head of the man who had been driving the launch.

"What the devil's the matter?" spat the Shepherd.

Larry shook the sweat from his eyes.

"There's a kind o' curtain," he said, "hangin' over the door. You can't get at it, to shift it, an'—"

"'Can't get at it?'" raved the Shepherd.

"No, sir. We tried to pull it, but—"

The Shepherd stamped his foot.

"'Pull it' be damned! Cut it. Rip it, you—"

Larry's head disappeared.

THE truth, of course, was this—that neither Mangey nor Larry fancied the job; for whoever thrust by or under the very embarrassing curtain which Mansel and I had let down, would put himself at the mercy of a couple of desperate men. At least, that was their belief; and if Mansel and I had been there, it would have gone very hard with the first man to enter that cell.

Larry put up his head and spoke to Digs.

"You got a knife?" he said.

As Digs' hand went to his pocket—

"One moment," said the Shepherd softly. *"Where's Mangey's knife?"*

I despair of describing the significance with which he invested these words; and the silence which succeeded his question was that of death. At length—

"Mangey," said the Shepherd quietly.

The seconds passed, but Mangey made no reply.

"I called you, Mangey," said the Shepherd. "Come up—and speak to me here."

Larry's head disappeared, and after what seemed a long time, another head took its place.

"Yes?" said Mangey thickly.

"Come up and out," said the Shepherd.

Mangey came slowly up, but he did not climb out of the trap; he stayed where he was on the ladder, with a battered oil-lamp in his hand. He did not speak, but he made a helpless movement, as though to suggest that that was the best he could do, because he needed two hands to climb out of the trap.

"Give the lamp to Larry," said the Shepherd; "and do as I said."

Deliberately, Mangey obeyed. As he wrung the sweat from his forehead—

"Nice mess they've made," he said. "Torn the canvas down like—"

"Quite so," said the Shepherd smoothly. "Where is your knife?"

"Ah," said Mangey, "that's what I'd like to know. I know I 'ad it this morning. It must of fell out of my pocket when—"

"Look in my eyes."

Very slowly the luckless skipper lifted his head. . . .

They say that murder will out. But that night I saw murder *dragged* out—wrenched by sheer force of will from the heart of a guilty man. I saw Mangey cower away, with the back of a hand to his eyes.

"I never done it," he whimpered; "I never done Bright Boy in."

"Tell him I sent you," said the Shepherd—and shot him clean through the brain.

Anything more cold-blooded could hardly, I think, be conceived; but if anyone present was shaken, he gave no sign. The three men stood their ground, with Mangey's body before them, flat on its back. Then the Shepherd put up his pistol and turned to Digs.

Now this was the very first time that the Shepherd had looked our way; and when he did so, I felt my hair rise on my head. Dark as it was, I could see the flame in his eyes.

I had seen this once before—in a lighted street; but as I have related, the saloon of this tender was in semi-darkness, and so the dreadful effect was half as vivid again.

I can only suppose that they picked up the light from the ceiling and gave it back; but to see those two glinting orbs in the black of his face was a very unpleasant experience, and one which I would give a very great deal to forget.

I saw the man motion to Digs: if he spoke as well, I could not hear what he said, for my ears were still singing with the noise which his pistol had made. But he jerked his head at the trap, and Digs stepped over the body and made his way down below.

AFTER perhaps a minute, we heard the rip of the sail-cloth, torn as we had torn it twelve hours before. In the si-

lence which followed, the Shepherd stepped up to the trap.

"Well?"

"There's another layer," said Larry. "Another layer of canvas we'll have to get through."

AT this the Shepherd let fly, and Larry appeared on the ladder—as much, I think, for some air, as to try to explain. But the Shepherd cursed his head off and drove him back.

"I don't care if there's twenty layers, you white-livered dog! I'll give you one more minute to fetch those two out."

There was no mistaking the dangerous note in his voice, and Larry and Digs worked like madmen to rip the sailcloth away. Indeed, there could be no doubt that if they had been afraid of encountering Mansel and me, they were now much more afraid of, so to speak, pushing the Shepherd over the edge. We could hear them cursing and grunting and tearing the canvas down, while the Shepherd stood fuming above them and tapping the floor with his toe.

Now the cell into which they were breaking was in a confusion which will hardly go into words. It was near a foot deep in sawdust, and sailcloth was hanging and sprawling all over the place. Since they had no torch, but only a mean oil-lamp, the picture which this revealed must have been so strange and unnatural that a man better placed than Larry would have found himself at a loss to describe what he saw; and since the time they had been given was more than up, but the men for whom they were looking were not to be seen, it is my belief that the two went into the cell—as much to be out of range, as to think how best to report their unsavory news.

But this is all speculation, because the next that we knew was that someone was screaming in terror, and a flame like that of a beacon was flaring out of the trap.

What exactly had happened, no one will ever know. Perhaps the bottom fell out of the primitive lamp. But fire broke out somehow, and the sawdust and sailcloth went up in a sheet of flame.

The Shepherd started back. Then, quick as a flash, he did an unspeakable thing: He caught the lid of the trap and slammed it back into place. . . .

No one on earth could have helped those unfortunate men, and I very much doubt if they could have helped themselves; for they were in the midst of a furnace, and the flames apart, they must have been asphyxiated almost at once. Still, to slam the furnace-door was to kill what chance they had, and only a very monster could have done such a terrible thing.

But worse was to come.

We could hear the dull roar of the fire, and wisps of smoke were rising from the edges of both the traps, when the Shepherd gave Satan an order that froze my blood:

"Fetch Formosa down here."

There could be but one explanation of such an order as that. The man had reason to think that George and I were now being burned to death; he proposed to have done with Formosa—by committing her to the flames also. From the point of view of a fiend, his decision was wise. The tender was doomed. Any minute now the flames would break out of the traps, and long before help could arrive, the vessel would be blazing from stem to stern. If the ruins were ever examined, an odd bone or two might be found; but no one could tell whose they were, and no one would care. Formosa, with five other beings, would have been "sunk without trace."

I was up on my feet now and was standing back from the hatch. I cannot remember rising; no doubt, mechanically, I had done as Mansel had done.

The latter was speaking quietly:

"Leave him to me. Carson, stand by to catch him. I don't want the fellow to fall."

But Satan did not appear.

He must, I think, have boggled at carrying out an order of such ferocity, for the Shepherd stamped his foot and raised his voice to a roar.

"I said, 'Fetch Formosa down here!' Move, you damned wash-out! We've got to be clear of this hooker in two minutes' time."

So Satan came up the companion—to do his master's bidding and bring Miss Katharine Scrope to be burned alive.

I DID not see Mansel hit him, but I heard the thud of the blow; and Satan seemed to lift himself up and then to collapse. But though his feet were trailing, he did not fall, for Carson was holding his body under the arms.

Mansel was speaking again.

"Lay him down there. . . . And now listen. I mean, if I can, to take the Shepherd alive. You two will stand out of sight upon either side of the hatch. I

shall be up on its hood. And when I say 'Excuse me,' you will each of you seize one arm. But if I say anything else, you will both of you jump for cover as quick as ever you can."

Now the hatch was, as I have shown, a companion-hatch—that is to say, a rectangular hole in the deck, with a flight of stairs running down; this hole was covered with a hood, and no one could reach the deck except by its mouth; neither, as he came up, could he see to right or to left, but only straight before him, for what that was worth. And that was little enough, for the mouth of the hatch was less than three feet wide.

Disposed as we were, we could hardly have failed to capture nine men out of ten: but the Shepherd was the tenth man, as all three of us knew. Apart from what Katharine had said, we had seen for ourselves that the man was beside himself; and when Satan failed to return—

I shall never forget standing there, with my eyes upon Mansel's face; he was lying still as death on the top of the hood, leaning over and down, with his eyes on the stair. I could hear the roar of the fire, now more intense, and smoke was making its way from the mouth of the hood. And my teeth were chattering so that, lest they should betray my presence, I thrust a finger between my jaws.

OUT of so many big moments—for so they seemed—I sometimes think that this was the biggest of all. I was waiting to scotch the snake—the snake which had turned upon us because I had seen its spots, which had, for that indiscretion, passed sentence of death upon my lady and me. For more than a fortnight now, we had lived and moved in the shadow of sudden death, more truly captive than if we had lain behind bars; and for nearly a week of that time each had suffered the awful torture of never knowing whether the snake had struck—whether to hope was hopeless, because the other was dead. But now all that was over, the gates of safety and freedom were open wide, and we were about to pass through them—by making our jailer prisoner, by scotching the snake.

Right up to the last I feared that the Shepherd's terrible instinct would suggest to him the reason Satan did not return; and I think it would have done so, if passion had not been blunting his finer faculties. The luck was against him that night. Had Mangey told him the truth, when first he arrived, I very much doubt if the man would have left the launch; and this would have made things very much harder for us, for so long as he stayed on the launch, Katharine would have been lying directly under his hand. And had he not been ruled by impatience, he would have discovered that Mansel and I had escaped, and would have had three men left to help him to fight the battle to which he was going alone. In a word, he had grounded upon the same shoal as had we: Mangey! The water-rat he had stamped on had let him down.

And then I saw Mansel nod.

Almost at once the beam of a torch appeared. The Shepherd was on his way up.

I saw Mansel's hands go down. . . . Then—

"Excuse me," he said, and took the man by the neck.

To seize his wrists then was not difficult, because his hands had gone to his throat; and once we had them, the fellow stood perfectly still. But when I told Mansel that we had him, and Mansel had let him go, without any sort of warning the Shepherd threw himself back.

He was so heavy, and rage had lent him such strength, that, had the companion been wider, Carson and he and I must all have gone down; but the hood simply could not admit more than one at a time, and Carson and I were literally jammed in its mouth.

For a moment he strained like a madman, bracing his feet against a step and doing his very utmost to drag us down; then he seemed to see that it was hopeless, and I felt his muscles go slack.

When we pulled him back to the deck, he did not resist; but when he was up, he peered at Mansel and Carson, as though the two were unreal. Then—

"I know Mr. Solan," he said. "But who are the other two?"

None of us made any answer; but Mansel ran his hands down him and took two pistols away. Then—

"Put his hands behind him," he said. A moment later the Shepherd was wearing gyves.

FIVE minutes—not more—had gone by, and the launch was in midstream. As before, she had five aboard; but only two of these belonged to her passenger-list: and one of those was unconscious, and one had cuffs on his wrists. Carson was steering, and Mansel, our prisoner and I were sitting in the cabin, whose

blinds were down. Satan was sprawling in the doorway. I glanced at him now and again for a sign of life.

Before we had left the tender, Carson had entered the water and taken the net from the screw; and I had found Katharine and George, told them that the Shepherd was taken, and begged them to make for the Rolls and wait for us there. When I got back, the flames were in the saloon, so we used the launch's engine to get us away from the scene.

THE Shepherd regarded Mansel, who was himself perusing the contents of a note-case or wallet which he had taken out of the Shepherd's coat.

"You have the advantage of me."

"Clearly," said Mansel shortly. He held up a visiting-card. "Your name—and address—and club?"

The other raised his eyebrows.

"May I know by what right—"

"Not your club," said Mansel. "I might have known. I think the hall-porter of Walter's would—"

"I have been a member of Walter's for twenty-five years."

"Thank you," said Mansel. He passed a paper to me. "Just run your eye over that."

The paper was very old, and the fine handwriting was faded, but easy to read.

This great ruby was given by King Henry the Seventh to Robert, Lord of Charing, for services rendered in 1506.

As I handed it back—

"One of the Mountjoy heirlooms," said Mansel. "Stolen from Castle Godfrey two years ago."

The Shepherd sighed. "Would it interest you," he said slowly, "to know where those heirlooms are?"

"Very much," said Mansel. "But it's fair that you should know this—that though it would interest me, it will not help you. Nothing can help you. You're going to lose your life in ten minutes' time."

The Shepherd smiled. "Such frankness suggests that you've nothing to do with the police."

Mansel made no reply, but he held up a photograph of Katharine, exactly like those which Judas had given to Mangey the night before.

"Link after link," he said. "But there's one to come."

"Which is that?" said I.

"My—er—sobriquet," said the Shepherd. "Unless your friend can find that, no one will ever believe that it is my career he has ended, and not that of somebody else. In the old days they cut off the head and put it into a sack—and later produced it to those of little faith. But that method is out of date. Besides—"

"This is much better," said Mansel, and held up a menu card.

The Shepherd sat very still. Then—

"I'd forgotten that," he said quietly. "One ought not to keep such things. But the trifle amused me—it's really admirably done."

This was less than the truth.

On the back of the menu card was a fine pen-and-ink caricature. It was the man to the life, with his glass in his eye. He was smiling expansively—and he was dressed as a shepherd: in the true Arcadian tradition, with breeches and stockings, and ribbons adorning his hat and his crook.

Mansel laid the papers together and put them back in the case. As he slid this into his pocket:

"Good enough for my purpose," he said.

"Which is?" said the Shepherd.

"As you surmised," said Mansel, "to be able to prove who you—were."

"Before we—er—part," said the Shepherd, "may I ask a question or two?"

MANSEL raised his eyebrows.

"I don't know that they will be answered. But you can always try."

The Shepherd nodded. Then—

"Did you get at Mangey?" he said.

"I tried to," said Mansel: "but Mangey let me in."

"How did you get onto him?"

"I was after Rudy," said Mansel. "And Messrs. Solan and Laking were after you. So we pooled our information—with this result."

The Shepherd sighed.

"Cherchez la femme!" he said. "I assume you were watching the tender when Judas came down."

Mansel nodded.

"The rest followed on."

"Quite so. The details can wait—for ten minutes. . . . But why did Mangey kill Judas—and force your hand?"

(I think those four last words will show what a lightning brain the Shepherd possessed. After only three questions he had the truth in his hands.)

"Cherchez la femme," said Mansel. "He threatened to squeak about Daisy, if Mangey put a foot wrong."

"And then led the way out? Well, well. . . . Some people will never learn. Did Mangey know that you were four strong, and not two?"

"Yes," said Mansel.

"And lest he should buy himself trouble, the fool suppressed that highly important fact." The Shepherd sighed. "That is the kind of folly which has lost battles and wars. We read of Cæsars and Napoleons; but it is the Mangeys of this world that have made its history."

There was a little silence. Then—

"Anything else?" said Mansel.

"One thing more—I still have some minutes left. It is—with some diffidence—that I refer to Miss Scrope."

"That I can well believe."

We used the launch's engine to get us away; as before, she had five aboard—but one of these was unconscious, and one had cuffs on his wrists.

"Naturally," said the Shepherd, and crossed his legs. "The trouble, of course, was this—that big business knows no law. I had hoped that she would see reason—that when Mr. Solan was dead, she would see the wisdom of—er—coming back to the fold. Such a course would have been without precedent: but then Miss Scrope is a very exceptional girl, and business being business, hers would have been the exception that proved the rule. That, then, was the position—I hoped for Sir Valentine's sake, that she would return to the fold. The lover might be dead, but the father remained. When all's said and done, it was business. Deprived of Cardinal, Sir Valentine would have fretted and pined away. If I could see that, so could she. And so I hoped and believed that she would come back. What is more, I know I was right. For her father's sake, Formosa would have picked up her bit. And then, to my great inconvenience, Sir Valentine died. . . .

"Well, that altered everything. The moment I heard the news, I knew that Formosa would never serve me again. More. With nothing to lose, she would certainly do her best to revenge Mr. Solan's death. In a word, from being invaluable, she had become most dangerous. I could not—make away with her. I defy any man alive to have made away with so lovely a work of art. Yet she had to be done with—somehow; because I could not afford to spare Mr. Solan's life. I am not excusing myself—for such business as mine requires no excuse. For compassionate outlaws there is no room in nature. I am simply stating wherefore I did as I did. . . .

"And now, once again, the case is altered. Mr. Solan has been reprieved, and I am as good as dead. Only, Formosa remains."

THERE was another silence.

"'Formosa remains,'" said Mansel. "What do you mean by that?"

"I think you know what I mean. In the last three years Formosa has carried hundreds of thousands of pounds' worth of stolen gems. She's never been taken, of course: but for some years to come she will still be a valuable prize. And when my reign is over, and the many who know Formosa know that they have nothing to fear, I think that more than one will decide to better himself by pointing her out to the police.

"Now I cannot prevent that happening: neither can you. But, with your help, I might even now be able to, shall we say, spoil their game. You said just now that you would be interested to know where the Mountjoy heirlooms are. You were good enough to add that such information would not assist my case. Would it assist Formosa's?"

"It might," said Mansel quietly.

The Shepherd leaned forward.

"I HAVE upon me the key of a coffer I own, in a safe-deposit at Paris—the name's on the key. Lying in that coffer are some of the finest jewels that have been stolen in Europe during the last two years. Any big man will identify every one. I'll give you that key—tell you where to find it and let you take it yourself—if you will use those gewgaws to buy Formosa off. Give a list to the police, and say if they want them back, they can have them on one condition—that action is never taken against Miss Katharine Scrope." He threw himself back on his seat. "I believe it's called 'reparation': but nobody, high or low, will ever have made such reparation as that."

"D'you mean this?" said Mansel.

"I do. Will you do as I say? My time must be nearly up, so call it a 'last request.' After all, she is my protégée: and it would be distasteful to me in the highest degree that she should be—er—inconvenienced after my death." With that, he rounded on me. "Don't look so surprised, Mr. Solan. There's no inconsistency here. I'm doing this because I have nothing to lose. Half an hour ago, Formosa was only a pawn. But now my race is run. Business has ceased to be business, and I can afford to remember that before I took to stealing, I was a gentleman."

Mansel rose to his feet.

"You may take it from me," he said, "that Miss Scrope will never be troubled, provided your coffer in fact contains what you say it does. I can fix London *and* Paris—with such an argument."

The Shepherd nodded twice, with his eyes upon Mansel's face.

"If you care to unfasten my collar. . . . The key is attached to a chain which is round my neck. Don't try to undo it, but pass it over my head."

Thirty seconds later, a platinum chain and a key were lying in Mansel's hand.

He examined the key, and tested the strength of the chain. Then he slipped the latter over his head and tucked the two into his collar and out of sight.

The Shepherd was speaking again.

"At the risk of exceeding my time, I have one more statement to make and two more questions to ask."

"Well, please be quick," said Mansel. "The sooner Miss Scrope is in bed, the better for her."

"Quite so. The statement is this. Five years ago I was warned to beware of Greece. A soothsayer uttered that warning—a very wise man. From that day on, I would never deal with a Greek." He shrugged his shoulders. "An idle precaution, of course, for Fate never shows her hand and oracles speak in riddles which few can solve. Well, we know that the warning was sound, for Mr. Solan bears a famous name." He turned to me. "I assume it's some sort of corruption."

"Yes," said I. "The original name was Soleyne. But it's another family that spells it *Solon*."

"Quite so. But the point is this—that when a man is doomed, Fate takes no chances at all. Strange as I found your name, I never connected you with that downright prophecy. I could have killed you twice over that night at Cardinal: but because my eyes were blinded, I let you go. And then, when it was too late and I was back at Rouen, then I remembered I must beware of Greece.

"And now for my questions. . . .

"First"—he returned to Mansel—"exactly how do we part?"

"WE'RE going ashore," said Mansel; "but you will go down with the launch. I imagine you'd rather be drowned than be burned alive."

"Infinitely," said the Shepherd, blandly. "Indeed, I have always understood that death by drowning was unexceptionable."

"I propose to lay you out first."

"I beg," said the Shepherd, indignantly, "that you will do nothing of the kind." Mansel made no reply. "And now pray make your arrangements. I'll leave my second question right to the last."

"My arrangements are made. Ask it now."

"I stand corrected. May I know whom I have the pleasure of addressing—or would that be indiscreet?"

Mansel looked down at his hands, as though uncertain whether or no to reply. Then he looked suddenly up.

"My name is Mansel," he said.

His eyes aflame, the Shepherd started up from his seat.

"Well, I'm damned," he said hoarsely.

"No doubt about that," said Mansel—and flicked him under the chin.

I use the word "flicked," because he appeared to hit him no harder than that: I never knew till later that Mansel had been one of the finest boxers that ever stepped into a ring.

Be that as it may, the Shepherd's head went back and the fellow sat down and fell sideways on to his face.

"I'm sorry," said Mansel, quietly. "That was your job. But he is not out like Satan, and you shall pinion the fellow and send him down."

With that, he produced some cord, and I lashed the Shepherd's ankles together and then his wrists.

AS Mansel removed the handcuffs—"We must leave no trace," he said. "But that's not enough. Whenever the launch is found, I want them to look for Satan and not for us." He put his hand to a shelf and pulled a life-belt down. "Get Satan's jacket off and tie this on to his carcass as quick as ever you can."

Whilst I was doing this, he opened the cabin's portholes, of which there were six. These were diminutive. Then he picked the Shepherd up and set him down on the floor, with his face to the cabin's entrance.

As he hung Satan's coat on a hook—

"Will you take the helm from Carson, and send him here? As soon as you've got your bearings, turn away from the shore and switch the searchlight out. There's a craft a mile away, but I can't see anything else."

I did as he said—and never saw Satan again; for they heaved him overboard and Carson slipped into the river and towed him ashore. (In fact, the cold water revived that very unpleasant man: so, as soon as the two had landed, Carson took the precaution of laying him out again.)

Mansel came aft.

"There may be a cock somewhere: but, if there is, I can't find it, and so you must stave her in. Will you come and do the job, while I hold the torch? She's flimsily built, so it oughtn't to take very long."

With the aid of the heavy jimmy, it took me a very few moments to wrench a plank from its place; then the water burst in like a fountain and soaked us both.

As I stood back and away—

"'The glory of young men is their strength,'" said the Shepherd, agreeably.

I turned my head, to meet the flame in his eyes.

"I've no compunction," I said.

"Of course not. And Mr. Laking: Is he on duty tonight?"

"On other duty," said I, "to his great regret."

"Allow me to congratulate you on your auxiliaries."

"I'm much obliged."

"And on your engagement."

"Thank you."

"Will you tell her I deeply regret—"

"—that you were prevented from burning Formosa alive?"

"THAT," said the Shepherd, "would not be strictly correct. I should, as we know, have preferred to dispose of you both: but, had my hand not been forced by the outbreak of fire, I should never have considered employing a method so crude. No, what I was going to say was how much I regret that considerations of business should have compelled me to meddle with her private affairs. You, for instance, and Cardinal. It would have been great presumption, had I had less to lose. I'll give you this, Mr. Solan—as you came up to my table, that night at the Wet Flag, I saw from the set of your jaw that either you or I would have to be—er—written off before very long. I had reason to think it would be you. But, since it has not been you, you must try to believe that I do not grudge your success. The odds against you were great. Yet you stand there free, whilst I lie here bound. Now that is a great achievement, look at it how you will. And I attribute it largely to the fact that you declined to be daunted by a prospect as hopeless as it was formidable.

"Now lest these words should seem to you to smack of hypocrisy, let me say this—that, if, in response to some half-baked conception of magnanimity—one which I'm sure Captain Mansel would do his best to correct—you were at this very last moment to set me free, I should take a leaf out of your book, and should use my best endeavors, however hopeless it seemed, to destroy, first, Captain Mansel, and then Miss Scrope and yourself. That statement should prove my sincerity."

"I'll say you know how to lose."

"That's instinct," said the Shepherd. "It's not experience."

The water, halfway to our knees, was nearly up to his chin.

I indicated the jimmy, still in my hand.

"Would you," I faltered, "would you like me to lay you out?"

"I can think of nothing," he replied, "that I should dislike so much."

All was very quiet now, for the water within the launch had risen above the gash which I had made in her side. Very far in the distance, I heard the drone of some car: but though I strained my ears, I could not hear the throb of a screw, and upon our reach of the river there was not a single light. The launch was now in mid-stream, and I could but just distinguish the banks upon either side, but when I looked back I could see the red glare of the fire, and the trees of the forest standing against the glow, and the water reflecting the flames.

Mansel touched my shoulder.

"Any moment now," he said. "When the water reaches the portholes, she'll settle at once. Drop the jimmy overboard and stand by to swim."

The Shepherd's head was tilted back. His mouth was just clear, but the water was up to his ears.

As his eyes met mine, he smiled.

"I have always maintained," he said, "that death is a great adventure: and when I have had occasion to cut short another's life, I have always consoled myself with the reflection that, for all we knew, I was doing him a very good turn. In that spirit, I take my leave. Good night, Captain Mansel."

"Good night."

"It has been a very great pleasure to meet so distinguished a man. Good night, Mr. Solan."

"Good night," said I.

"May I say I hope you'll be happy?"

"Thank you," said I. "I'll tell Miss Scrope you said that."

"That's very generous. One always values most highly the things which one least deserves."

I saw the water lipping a porthole, and while I was watching and waiting for it to break, I heard a sudden splash on the opposite side. And then, before I could think, all six portholes were discharging small bows of water, after the way of a mask through which some rill has been schooled to fall into a pond.

"Quick!" said Mansel.

One after another, we mounted the seat and dived. . . .

I looked back now and again, as we made for the shore, for the cabin-lights were still burning; though each time she seemed to be disappearing, the next time I turned to look, she was still there.

I decided to swim ten strokes before turning again. . . .

As I came to the eighth—

"She's going," said Mansel.

I was just in time to see her go down by the head.

"Well, that's that," said I, as we waded ashore.

"More than he deserved," said Mansel. "He was 'an hard man, reaping where he had not sown and gathering where he had not strewed.' Human life in his eyes was a chattel—a belonging: no more than that. As such, he took it away, and as such, he rendered it up five minutes ago. If you had to plead for him, Solan, what would you say?"

I answered at once:

"That, at least, he bore no malice."

"Exactly," said Mansel. "And that is a very rare trait in the underworld." His fingers went to his throat. "To that we owe this quite invaluable key. It's as good as the King's pardon for a certain lady whom we know!"

NOW that the terror was laid, the thing that concerned us most was Katharine's health. She showed no sign of sickness, but she was very quiet; and remembering all she had suffered during the last ten days, we feared that any moment she would break down.

It was arranged that, if she were fit to travel, we should all leave for Southampton the following night, to spend ten days or a fortnight at Mansel's country home. When George and I protested that we could not presume so far, Mansel only smiled and clapped me upon the back.

"I'm not issuing an invitation—I'm issuing an order," he said. "It is of the utmost importance that we should leave this district at once. Mabel and Satan won't dare to open their mouths: but the tender has been destroyed and the launch is gone, and when the latter is found,—as it almost certainly will be in two or three days,—the police will get very busy: and I should prefer that we were well out of range. And as you know, I have a trust to discharge in the matter of those jewels; and the sooner that that is done, the better for all concerned."

To our great relief, my lady slept very well, and she stayed in bed the next day until after tea: but though she was plainly better and glad to listen and talk, she never referred to her abduction or to the days she had spent in Mabel's company.

As I knelt by her side, she touched my cheek.

"Poor Esau—with his beard! It was strictly correct, of course: but you must have been so thankful to take it off. Was that why you didn't kiss me?"

"No," I said. "You looked too tired to be kissed. But you're different today."

"I feel very different. I—hadn't been sleeping well."

She slid an arm round my neck.

"That day in the bracken," she whispered. "When you made love to me while George was waiting for Joseph before the Shepherd went by . . . I was exalted then. You lifted me up to the very top of my bent. Shall I ever recapture that, Esau? Or are you doomed to have a dud for a wife?"

"My darling girl," I breathed, "what do you expect? Think of the punishment which you have taken since then! You wouldn't be human if you could stand up and shout. We're out of the wood, you and I. But we have been through—tribulation of a very exceptional kind, and though I am now more thankful than I thought a man could be—well, I'm not singing any pæans. . . . I only want to sit quiet—with my eyes on your face."

THAT night I stood with her on the deck of the ship and watched the lights of France sink into the sea; and we both remembered another summer evening, when we had strolled on the deck of another ship—and I had kissed her fingers and they had closed upon mine.

"Don't ever leave me, Esau."

I set my cheek against hers, and we stood in a bittersweet silence, until the last light had gone out. At length—

"It was nice of him," she said slowly, "to—to think of me, at the last. I'm glad—to have that to remember."

"He said he hoped we'd be happy."

"If he said it, he meant it. He had many faults, but he always meant what he said."

(Here ends the record which forms the basis of this novel: a record set down by Mr. Solan in order that if the tongues of calumny should ever attack his beloved wife—or widow—the true facts might be known in her justification. Apparently Mr. Solan and his wife were granted a period of happiness before the war came. But Captain Solan lost his life in Flanders; and Mrs. Solan, while serving as a nurse, was killed in one of the earlier bombing raids on England.)

THE END

Rule of Thumb

A life-or-death chance down in a quicksilver mine.

By RALPH CONDON

AT ten o'clock in the morning, Jim Carr pulled the ribbon from his adding-machine, then copied the total onto the bottom of a monthly report sheet and turned to gaze sourly out the window at the ugly jumble of trams, dumps and rusted iron buildings that made the plant of the Aurora Quicksilver Mine.

On the ridge beyond the furnace sheds, sulphur dioxide was shoving slowly from the high condenser stack. It hung cooling for a little, making a dirty yellow cloud on the still, draftless air before it slipped down over the camp. Jim swore at it because he knew it stank; and he knew that it wasn't the only thing around the Aurora that—didn't smell so good. Compared with the operations-report he he had just finished, the sulphur dioxide was as sweet and as fresh as a daisy.

Jim had eighty men working underground, and his report showed that they had mined only three thousand tons of pay ore in the last thirty days as against six thousand tons during the month before. That meant half the take for the same operations-cost.

Of course, the explanation was all there in one terse paragraph of the report. It said: *"West country on seven-hundred level. Forty men from first of May to first of June. Development."*

To Jim, or anyone else who really knew the mine, that item was enough. The Aurora was very old. It had been opened almost a century before and worked for seventy-five years. Thirty miles of tunnels, drifts and shafts had been driven through its richest ore bodies; then, because the old style Scott furnaces couldn't show a profit on low-grade rock, it had been closed and had lain idle for twenty years. During that time, the perfection of the rotary type furnace had given value to cheap ore again and when the war had kicked the price of quicksilver up, the Great Western people had bought the place out, installed two of the new tubes and gone to mining again.

Jim Carr had come in with the first gang that installed the furnaces. He had stayed when that job was finished; and because he had judgment, and an understanding of men, he had worked his way up to the superintendent's job.

At first, things had gone well; then the easily reached ore stringers had pinched out and the deeper levels had to be tapped. That meant clearing out old caved tunnels, re-timbering, and heavy expense against a future profit. Jim had been successful in balancing that expense against the production of pay ore until the first of May, when one of their last two stringers on the two-hundred level had played out. He had had to shut down one of his furnaces then and shift half of his underground crew to the opening of the West seven hundred country.

The development work had been tougher than he feared; at the same time, a shift of stock control in the Great Western Company had started a yell for quick profit and all he had to show them was this report.

Jim didn't figure he was going to get very far explaining things to Fred Archer, the outside engineer whom the new controlling stockholders had hired to check the place over—but he knew he was very soon going to have a chance to try. He had a letter on his desk saying that Archer would be in with Henry Shattuck, the president, on the first of June, and he heard right now the sound of a car coming up the hill through camp.

Jim got up and put a cover over the adding-machine. He stood for a moment, letting his eyes run around the little office. It was littered and dusty, but he liked it. It was his office and it represented a lot to a man who had started as a flunky, studied nights and worked his way along without any drag at all. Jim didn't like the idea of leaving that place,

"A hundred feet! My God! We'll smother in here!"

but he knew enough about reorganization of mining companies to know that when an outside engineer is hired to check over an outfit, he usually gets something into his report that suggests that it would be a good idea to give him the job of running the place. There are a lot more engineers than jobs these days and Jim had a hunch that he wouldn't be keeping the red cinabar dust off that office chair much longer.

The car he had heard stopped in the yard, so Jim went out.

HE had been thinking about Nancy Shattuck that morning, just the way he thought of her every day; but he hadn't figured she would come this trip. In spite of the lift it always gave him to see her, he had really hoped that she wouldn't be there—because the business in hand was going to be tough.

Nancy was Henry Shattuck's daughter and she had lived there at the mine with her father for a year while he was running the place himself and getting things started. She and Jim had seen each other every day during that year, but it hadn't taken him anywhere near that long to fall in love with her. He had done that just about the first time he had seen her and there hadn't been anything to change his mind since. There hadn't been anything said, either, that would make him think he was wasting his time or his hope, but Jim had come from a poor family and had known hard times; a hell of a lot harder than a wife of his was going to have; so he'd put off asking her anything until he could be dead sure of his job and the mine. Right then it looked as though it would be a long time before he got over that hurdle, into the asking class.

Nancy said: "Hello, Jim."

She gave him her hand, looking right straight into his eyes in a way she had. There was none of the fluttering-eyelid, clinging-vine stuff about Nancy.

Jim said, "Hello," and was glad she was there, no matter what the score.

He shook hands with Henry Shattuck next and Henry introduced him to Fred Archer and then they shook hands.

Archer was a big man but not heavy, with an easy way of moving. He looked as though he'd always had everything he wanted and didn't figure to change that set-up any.

He said, "Hello, Carr," and there was something that Jim didn't like about his tone. It struck him as being a little condescending, but he reminded himself that he wasn't in a spot to be enthusiastic over Archer—and kept his tone friendly when he returned the greeting.

Henry Shattuck said, "Well, Jim, I see the buildings haven't fallen down yet. How are things going?"

His voice was cheery but he looked tired and troubled and Jim had a quick conviction of something: Henry still had the title of president, but wasn't driving the wagon any more.

"Things are running all right," Jim said. "We've been opening a lot of new country down at seven hundred feet and we'll be hauling rock out of it in about a month. I've just tallied the May report, if you'd like to see it."

Archer smiled and Jim knew that he had been right about the condescension.

"If you don't mind, I think we'll skip the report for right now. That can wait until I've been through the mine and gotten a thorough idea of the set-up."

Jim opened his mouth and then closed it again. The idea of anybody getting a thorough idea of a big mine in a few hours' looking! He looked at Shattuck, but the older man had turned to Nancy and there wasn't much to do except say, "Okay, let's go."

They didn't waste any time after that and nobody had much to say while they got in the car and drove up the hill to Camp Three at the mouth of the old five-hundred-foot level.

AS a general thing, Nancy didn't like it underground, but she went along. Jim got her a hard hat and a carbide lamp with the others. While they were getting their lamps started in the tool-shed, they were standing close together and Nancy laid her hand on Jim's for an instant. He got some good out of the look in her eyes.

There were no rails laid in on the five-hundred-foot level and Archer asked about that.

"We don't figure to haul out on this level," Jim explained. "The ore we're shooting at is two hundred feet under this on Seven, which is blind. We just cleared up this old drift to bring in a blower pipe, air- and water-lines for the jackhammers, and to save the crews an extra three hundred feet of climbing when they go on and off. We skid the timbers and stope sets down a raise from the two hundred."

"I hope you don't mean you're planning to hoist your ore all the way up to the top level," Archer said and his tone sounded as though that were exactly what he did hope.

"No," Jim said, "the ore'll be brought out on the Seven level. It—"

"But if the Seven is blind—"

"Maybe it would have been a good idea for you to have taken a look at the report and at our mine maps," Jim said and he was mad enough so he didn't care how it sounded. "If you'd taken a look at those, you'd have seen that we are driving a cross-cut from the West Seven Country into the old Bell tunnel where the ore chute came down from the top of the mountain in the surface days. We figure to re-timber that and run the tracks in there."

Archer said, "I see," and then he allowed himself a tight smile. "I think maybe this is one of the things I was sent to find out about, Carr. Would you be good enough to tell me why you went to the expense of clearing this old tunnel and laying in your lines when you were going to tap in from below anyway? It seems to me that you've just about doubled your development cost."

Jim knew he was just being ridden for the benefit of Nancy and Shattuck and he was so mad he wanted to take a swing at the guy, but he kept things in hand. He looked at Henry Shattuck, but Henry was leaving things up to him.

"Well, in the first place," he said, "the old Bell tunnel is three times as long, due to the slope of the hill, and it would have cost that many times more to take the air- and water-lines in! In the second place, there's no circulation of air through there in the spring and fall of the year and we'd have had to put in an expensive blower system that we wouldn't need later. In the third place, not over half of my spare crew would have room to work on a single face and I'd have had to lay off better than twenty of them while that drift was being mucked through."

"I'm afraid," Archer said coldly, taking only the last point, "that you've got rather the wrong point of view from the economic standpoint. The object of this

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Grattan Condon

"Rules be damned," Jim said flatly. "This is a time when we'll use our own ignorant rule of thumb!"

concern isn't just to arrange things to see how many men we can keep employed. What we want to do is show a profit on those we do hire."

JIM decided he had better take a cut out of Archer right then and to hell with the job, but Nancy quickly suggested that they get going, so they started into the tunnel and he had a chance to cool down a little.

Like all very old mines, the five-hundred level had pressure-shrunk through the soft, heavy country near the surface and even Nancy had to stoop for the first hundred yards. There had been tracks for mule cars through it years before, but they had rusted away in the sulphuric dampness and been absorbed by the thrusting floor and a thick crusting of epsom salts. The place had a dank, depressing smell; and the new air- and water-lines laid along the bottom were beginning to oxidize through their galvanized coatings.

When they ran into hard rock, though, the going was better. There was headroom and the footing was dry and solid. They made good time there and Jim didn't call a halt until they hit the cooling-out station where the men left their coats before starting down the two hundred feet of manways to the Seven level.

At the station, Archer took another crack at Jim's mining methods.

"You've got a lot of natural acid out by the mouth, Carr. You could save money on pipe if you swung those air- and water-lines up along the wall with the blower tube where they wouldn't rust out so fast."

Jim hung up his coat and counted ten. "No, I guess they wouldn't rust so fast," he said and let it go at that. What was the use of trying to explain to a book engineer that air- and water-pipes were laid along the floor as a safety measure. A blower pipe was just twelve-inch tin and would collapse with a cave-in, anyway, but the little three-quarter-inch lines that packed the "wind" and "soup" for the jack-hammers were something else again. They were iron and they had a good chance of holding if they were laid along the floor. Whether they held or not could mean the difference between life and death to a gang trapped behind a fall!

Archer slipped out of his tweed jacket and squared his nicely balanced shoulders. He looked at Jim and smiled his unpleasantly pleasant smile.

"These little things mount up on the profit sheet—but they can be gone into and corrected later. The main thing I want to see is this development work you've been doing on the lower levels."

He pulled the detonating switch and threw his body over that of Nancy.

"Well, let's go on down," Henry Shattuck said and his troubled eyes flicked across Jim Carr's for an instant.

The ladder to Seven ran down through a sixty-five-degree manway the full two hundred feet to the working level. That much stairway is tough on any legs and Jim had the rather childish but entirely natural idea that it would be fun to give Archer a workout, but he took it easy because of Nancy and her father.

It grew steadily hotter as they went down. Like most mines in a sulphur formation, it built its own heat from the "slow fire" action of oxygen, but a return draught from the blower kept the carbon monoxide kicked out and the air was good.

From the foot of the manway, the tunnel ran straight off for a thousand feet, then broke up into a labyrinth of drifts, cross-cuts and stopes that made up what was known as the "old seven-hundred country."

Jim had twenty men split into five gangs working there on each of the day and night shifts. He set grimly to the task of showing all of those separate operations to Fred Archer, but right from the start, he knew the answer was going to be a squawk. He knew it was going to be a squawk because office-chair miners expect to see a yard of pay ore pulled out of every yard of rock moved, and there wasn't a single one of those five working faces that was showing a red stringer of mercuric sulphide.

On three of those faces, he was driving through old waste-filled stopes to get at drifts where the records showed that eight-pound-to-the-ton ore had been abandoned thirty years before. The fourth gang was driving through hard rock to avoid heavy country in reaching a blocked-off tunnel that held promise, and the fifth gang was the one that was cutting through to make the hauling outlet into the old Bell tunnel.

At first, Archer asked a lot of questions and he managed to ask them in a way so that the answers didn't add any favor to the set-up. After checking the

third gang, though, he lapsed into a silence more condemning than the questions and Jim knew just exactly how his report was going to read. It was going to end up with the opinion that a tremendous amount of money had been spent on a wild gamble, which, if it should have been undertaken at all, should have been done at a fraction of the cost with a single test-hole.

By the time they had seen all the faces except the new outlet tunnel, the tension had built up to a point where even Henry Shattuck looked discouraged and Jim didn't give a damn whether he lost his job or not.

It was noon when they got to the mouth of the new tunnel and they met the five men of its crew coming out. Chuck Converse, the shift boss, was with them and he stopped for a moment to talk with Jim.

He said that a round of powder-holes had been sunk in the face but not loaded. The loading would be done after lunch, and in the meantime, the crew was clearing out while the mid-day shooting was done in the other hard-rock drift.

Jim said, "Okay, Chuck," and then explained to Henry Shattuck: "I guess we'll pass this up for now. The first hundred feet of this hole is pretty heavy and we're going to have to sister-timber it. In the meantime, I've been having the boys clear out while the other gang shoots, in case of a fall."

"On the contrary," Archer said shortly, "now that I'm down here, I want to see everything. Have your man tell the other gang to hold their shots until I'm finished!"

The shift boss looked at Carr. Jim hesitated for one furious second and then nodded grimly.

"Okay, Chuck, tell 'em to hold it."

He turned and led the way into the tunnel. Archer was right behind him and he could hear the man deliberately counting off the paces as they went.

Nancy and her father brought up the rear and neither of them was saying anything at all.

THEY passed through the timbered, heavy ground and out into the hard rock, but Jim never even slowed down until they were all the way to the end.

Archer finished his counting with "ninety" and said in cold triumph:

"Two hundred and seventy feet of tunnel dug on a gamble, Carr. I don't wonder that you didn't want me to see it!"

"Listen," Jim snarled and spun around, "if you—"

It happened then. The earth trembled with the muffled, distant shock of six quick explosions; there was the grinding, murderous shriek of tortured, splintering timbers and the whole earth jammed down behind them to block the tunnel. The rock walls seemed to hold the sound for an instant, to hold it and crush its horror in on those four. Then there was silence, a silence so utter and complete that it held more terror than the din.

SHATTUCK swore to break that silence and Archer said, "Oh, my God!" in a high-pitched, strangled voice.

Nancy wasn't the kind of girl that screams or faints in the face of danger, but she did move forward to stand close and straight by Jim Carr. Jim looked down into her eyes for a second and he was proud of what he saw there.

Shattuck swore again mechanically and then said:

"That started to spill from the other end, Jim. That's a big fall—maybe a hundred feet!"

Archer spun all the way around, flinging his hands out wide and his eyes were wild.

"A hundred feet! My God! We'll smother in here—this air won't last us two hours!"

Jim turned about and threw a valve on the handle of a jackhammer. Air came shrilling out under seventy-five pounds of pressure and he let its sweet music run a moment before he shut it down.

"The boys must have shot before Chuck got there; but we've got plenty of air for now," he said and couldn't resist adding, "Maybe you get the idea why we lay these pipe-lines along the bottom."

Archer didn't get anything out of the words. He said thinly, "A hundred feet! How long will it take them to get through? We'll die—we—"

Jim said, "Shut up! This place aint a crying-room!"

Shattuck didn't pay any attention to Archer. He just took off his safety hat and ran his fingers through his gray hair. His face was grave.

"Jim, I don't know about this. The best the boys can do is two days and if that air-line should pinch off with the settling—"

"I was figuring on that," Jim told him, "and I don't figure to wait for that settling. We're going to go out of here while we've still got air."

Shattuck stood a moment meeting his eyes, then he said, "Hmmm," and turned to look at the drilled face of the tunnel.

"That's right," Jim said. "If my figures are right, this round of shots was about the last one needed to kick through into the old Bell tunnel."

Fred Archer sucked in a long breath. "If we're that close to through, why don't the men dig from that side? Why should they take two days from the other end?"

"Because they can't work in the Bell tunnel," Jim told him bluntly. "There's no air in there, nothing but carbon monoxide! It gets that way every spring and fall when there is no difference between the summit and cañon temperatures to make a draught."

"Then we're not going to blast through," Archer shouted. "We've at least got a chance here, but if we let the gas in, we'll lose that! Good God, man, if you don't know enough about the rules of physics and displacements to know that that crazy little air-pipe wouldn't hold the gas out—"

"Rules be damned," Jim said flatly. "This is a time when we'll use our own ignorant rule of thumb! Now either get out of the way or help!"

"Blast!" Archer stormed. "If you think I'll let—"

"*Let* me, hell!" Jim said—and slapped him hard across the face. "We got no time for hysteria here, Mister!"

Archer dropped back and Henry Shattuck said gravely to Jim, "I hope you're sure of what you're doing, son. You know he's right about that air-line—it'll never throw enough wind to start a draught in that other tunnel. It'll just go up the chute and we can never go out that way."

"Draught!" Jim barked. "I'll start enough draught through that place to suck your shoes off if I can once get in there!"

"Okay," Shattuck said, and they didn't waste any more words.

JIM kicked on the air again and the two men started loading those drill holes like mad while Nancy handed up the powder.

They put in double shots and tamped them home. They set the wires, hooked on the detonating box, and every second that they worked Jim listened for a change of tone or a lessening of that hissing air. If it quit, if the pressure of those thousands of tons of rock pinched it off, they were through. But it held up and was still coming free when the last shot was rammed in.

"Okay," Jim said and gave the battery box to Henry Shattuck. He moved the jackhammer and hose back from the face, said harshly, "Come on!" and ran back down the tunnel.

They got as far as they could toward the cave-in, and Jim took a second to choose a spot before he said, "All right—lie down, hold your ears and leave your mouths open."

When they were ready, he pulled the detonating switch and threw his body over that of Nancy.

THE concussion came up the tunnel in one awful rush; noise and flying stone followed and the very walls and floor seemed to rock and pitch. Then the sound washed back and there was nothing—but the high, whining hiss of the jackhammer valve and some weird groaning of the earth as it settled back into place.

Jim was first on his feet and saw the others crawling up, dazed but uninjured, as he went reeling down toward the blasted face. He let out a wild shout of joy when his light showed him a five-foot hole torn through into the inky black of a tunnel beyond.

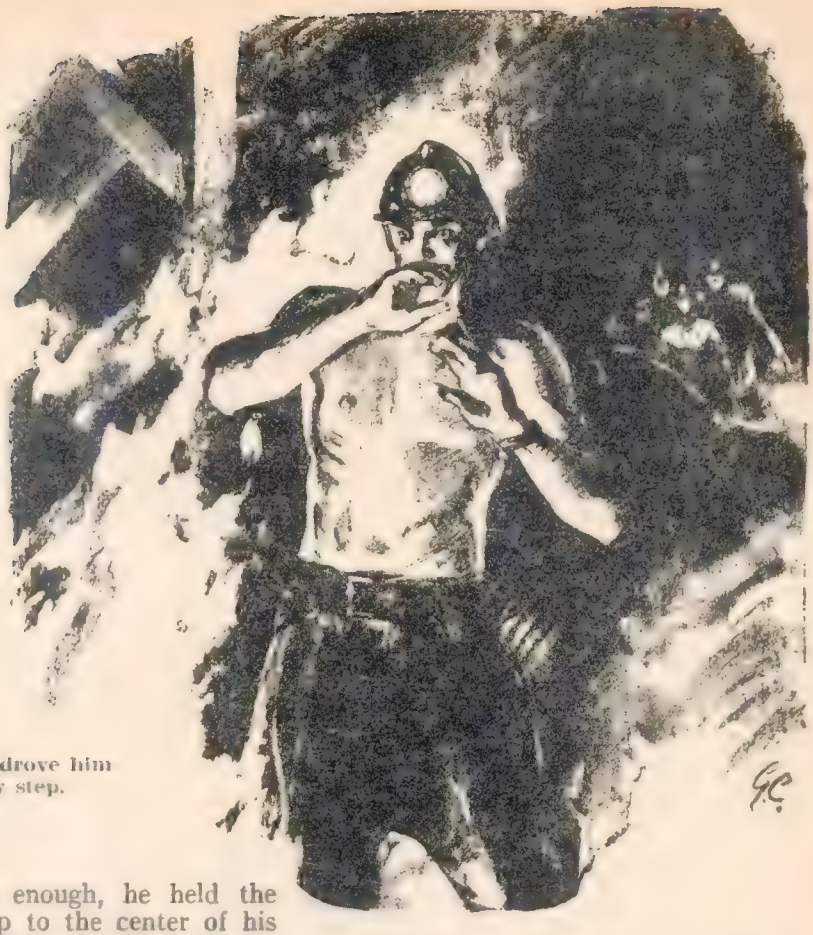
With the fear of an air-failure driving him like a fiend, he went to work. He kicked the coupling off the jackhammer, slapped on an extra fifty feet of hose and twisted the pipe shut-off valve open again.

"Wait here," he roared and with the hissing hose-end in his hands, he went through that hole into the old Bell tunnel.

Jim knew what to expect in there and when he took a breath, it was from behind his hand used as a baffle plate against the air-hose.

Down the tunnel, fifty feet to his right, was the foot of the head-shaft that came down from the top of the mountain. The old loading-station was there, with its great wooden ore box and filling-chute. Jim made that with his lamp still burning. He flung the hose down there with the force of its air throwing back against him from the timbers and went to work.

He ripped off his shirt and tore it into shreds. He emptied his pockets of matches, time-sheets and cigarettes and built them into a pile at the base of the wooden framing. On that pile he heaped splinters from planks and the frame of an old box that he kicked to kindling. On top of those, he angled bigger slabs, strips of board, lengths of two-by-four and the sides of an old tool-box.



The rising heat drove him back step by step.

When he had enough, he held the flame of his lamp to the center of his pile and prayed. He prayed to the god of roughnecks and miners that the air-hose would do it, and that it wouldn't pinch off too soon. He knew that there wasn't enough natural air in that hole to support combustion—but if the line didn't pinch off—by the gods, he could do it! If he could once get that great old loading-chute to roaring it would start the draught and suck enough good air into the tunnel to blow off a tin hat!

There was an awful moment of doubt; then his fire caught. He had to nurse it at first—give it just enough air and not too much. It went licking up, stronger and stronger—caught on to the heavy wood and began to crackle.

The rising heat drove him back step by step. He gave it more air and still more air until it was taking the full charge and climbing fast into the framing. The suction was really starting then, taking all the little hose could give and pulling for more as the flames went thrusting up through that ore chute. Like an old-fashioned air-tight stove that has to be blown upon to start and then builds its own violent draught, that oxygen-greedy fire was starting to pull air from its only possible source, which was the mouth of the old Bell tunnel a half mile away.

Jim could feel the wind going by. Faster and faster it pulled; it was still the dead monoxide of the tunnel, but the good outside air was on its way. Jim fought off his strangled dizziness and he was on his feet when it came. It came in a cool, lung-filling rush and Jim heard Henry Shattuck's wild, exultant yell.

He flung the hose down then and staggered back toward the newly blasted hole where the others were scrambling through. He saw Nancy and Shattuck and Archer, all alive and on their feet. He grinned into the waving glare of the lamps and he didn't even hate Fred Archer any more.

There was a mad, triumphant moment when Archer tried to get something said to Jim; but Nancy was in his way, so he had to yell it to Henry Shattuck above the roar of the fire.

Henry could only hear part of it, but he got enough to follow the idea and he grinned as he yelled back:

"Sure, we'll keep him on the job! But let's get the darned kids out of here before we all roast!"

All the Angles

MURLAY'S Billiard and Recreation Club is the largest and most centrally located establishment of its sort in River City. It has many bowling alleys in the basement, and a bar, and on the street floor a good restaurant and another bar, and on the second floor fifty-eight pool-, billiard- and snooker-tables. Except for the lunch-hour business, which comes almost entirely from just plain citizens who have jobs and work at them, Murlay's B. & R. C. is quiet until along in the afternoon when the baseball scores and race results begin to come in; when individuals who were up late for some reason or other the night before start showing up, along with those who have been out attending to business, such as the runners, collectors, and such in Squire Hinkle's numbers organization.

"The peaceful-minded individuals, like myself, scatter in all directions."

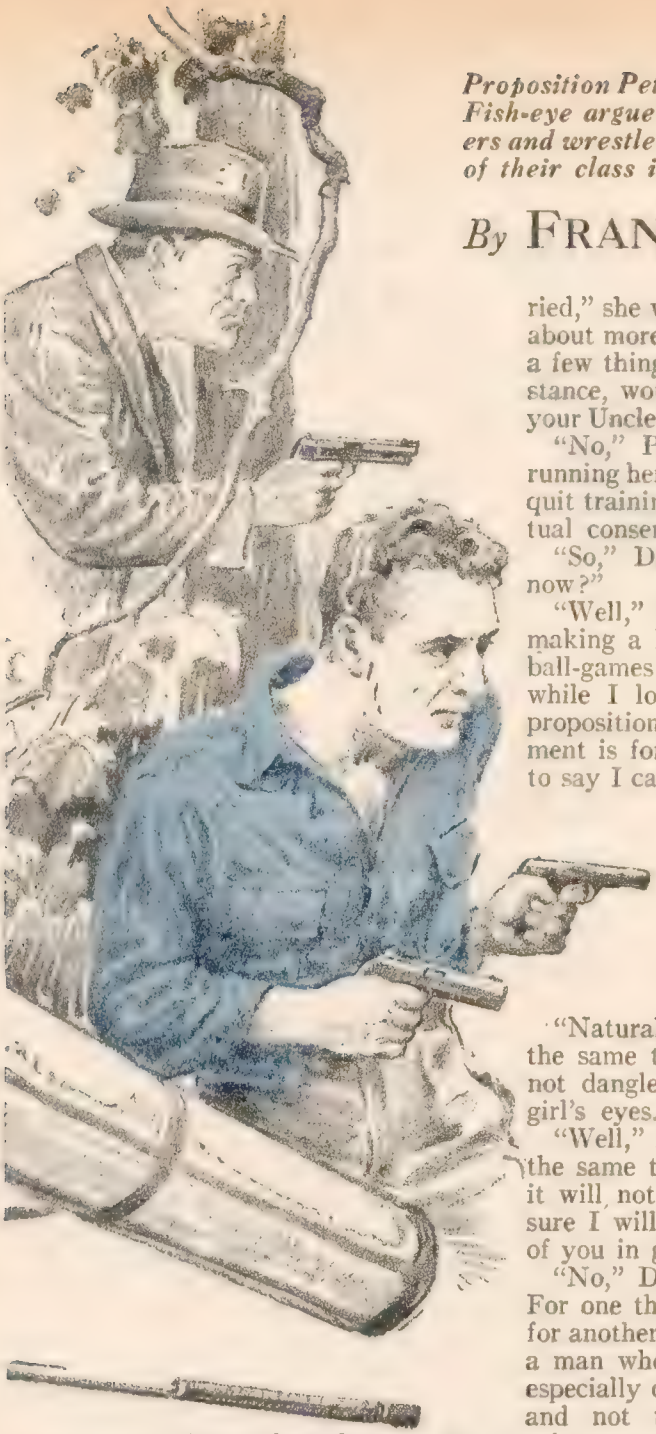
This morning, when Proposition Pete McGill came through the door at the top of the steps, was about like any morning: a tepid snooker-game was going on the open table with a few kibitzers; a few others were sitting around trying to dope the day's ball-games, or a stand-out horse; and Miss Daisy Murlay was standing, as she had these past three months, behind the cigar-counter and cashier's desk; none of which Prop noticed except Miss Murlay.

Miss Murlay's father had recently passed on, and she had come to Uncle Joe, who had given her this job, over no protest from his trade; for Miss Murlay was tall and blonde, with a figure fraught with interest, a smile of no mean voltage, and a cheerful, friendly nature.

After pausing a moment to swallow once and take a deep, firm breath, Prop walked to the counter and put his arms on it.

"Well, Prop," Miss Murlay said with her cheerful smile, "how are you today?"

"Daisy," Prop said, not beating around the bush a single beat, "I am thirty-three years old, and I never think any filly which has not got four legs will get me in my present condition; but it has been the same for the last two months, and I guess it will go on like that. Why, I do not know, unless it is because besides having such a lovely character and being very gorgeous to look at, you also know



Proposition Pete and Timelock Koonce and Fish-eye argue the relative merits of fighters and wrestlers and jockeys—and step out of their class into a golf-game to settle it.

By FRANCIS COCKRELL

Illustrated by
Charles Chickering

a great many things about horses. But whatever is the reason, there it is, and having thought the matter over very carefully, I have this proposition to make: Will you marry me?"

"I have been thinking about that same matter myself," Daisy answered promptly, "and the answer is yes, under certain—"

"I will ask your Uncle Joe to mind the counter for you," Prop said eagerly, "and we will beat it right down to the—"

"Under certain circumstances," Daisy persisted. "When a girl is getting married," she went on, "she has got to think about more than merely love. There are a few things I must know first. For instance, would you continue training for your Uncle Adelbert?"

"No," Prop said. "When they quit running here at Parkside last week, I also quit training for Uncle Adelbert, by mutual consent."

"So," Daisy said, "what do you do now?"

"Well," Prop said, "right now I am making a little book down here on the ball-games and some of the other tracks, while I look around. The only other proposition I have to train at the moment is for Squire Hinkle, and needless to say I can do without that."

"Naturally," Daisy agreed; "but at the same time you must admit you do not dangle much of a future before a girl's eyes."

"Well," Prop said, "maybe so; but at the same time I do not do so bad, and it will not be for very long, and I am sure I will always be able to take care of you in good shape."

"No," Daisy said, "it is not enough. For one thing it is very uncertain; and for another thing, I do not wish to marry a man who makes his living gambling, especially on horses. Horses are to race and not to bet on, unless possibly a few notes on your own entry for honor, or a feed-bill, but never on anybody else's—at least unless it is a guy you have swapped oats with more than once. I am afraid that unless you do better than this, I must begin to consider one or two other propositions I have on hand."

"Oh," Prop said hollowly. "Uh—who are these other propositions, if you don't mind me asking?"

"Well," Daisy said, "Fish-eye is the one I like best. Of course, Fish-eye may not be very romantic, but he is on the up

"Daisy," Prop says, "I have this proposition to make: Will you marry me?"

and up and proposes marriage, and a girl would not ever have to worry about where her next outfit was coming from."

"But," Prop said, "Fish-eye gambles."

"Fish-eye can afford to," Daisy said, "for he has a very nice income from the numerous slot-machines and punch-boards and cigarette-machines he maintains about the city."

Prop dropped the subject of Fish-eye Yager, for there was no question that Fish-eye was very alert about money matters.

"Well," he said presently, "I have always had in mind that I would get me a stake one day and have a small stable of my own." He paused a moment. "How would it seem to you," he said, "if we should be riding down the road in a good auto, headed for Saratoga, say, with a easy-going trailer on behind with a gelding in it we know can go in the right spot, and maybe a nice three-year-old that shows a lot of promise, brought along just right—and the sun shining down and money for feed and stable in our pockets? How would that seem, maybe?"

Daisy's eyes had grown dreamier and dreamier as he painted this picture of domestic bliss, this canvas of home and security, with strong roots in the good, broad highway which leads from one horse-oval to another.

She sighed. "Gee," she said, "wouldn't that be wonderful! Just like it was with me and Dad. Except the times we were broke. But I never minded much." She sighed again. Then she straightened briskly. "But you haven't got it!"

Prop reluctantly came back to the present. "Well," he said heavily, "you can't tell. Don't do anything without you let me know, anyhow, will you not?"

She promised she wouldn't, right away at least; and Prop wandered over by the snooker-game from force of habit and sat down, watching the players with unseeing eyes.

IT was strictly a time-killing game, only two-bits a cue; and besides that, it contained a player known, because of the inordinate deliberation with which he prepared for each shot, as Time-lock Koonce. Thus there was a good deal of the usual aimless general conversation, which had to do at the moment with what kind of competitor was the best athlete.

Hoppy Gunn contended a fighter was, because didn't he have to be in good shape and have that old timing and rhythm and plenty of guts, too? Foghorn Katz held out for the wrestling fraternity, for some reason; fighters was all right, but you take a rassler and put him in some kinda game that took co-co-co-öperation and touch and stuff, and he'd beat a fighter any time.

"You mean coördination," Klutch Kelso said, "but you are a long ways off your base. He wouldn't have a chancet. Anybody knows that. Ask—well, ask Prop here." He turned to Prop.

"What?" Prop said, looking up blankly from his own problem.

Klutch repeated the question.

"Oh," Prop said, considering it carefully. "Well," he decided, "if it's some-

thing where weight don't count, just bein' a good natural athalete and having plenty of moxie, and he had not hurt himself making the weight, why give me a good jock, I'd say. Any time."

"For my dough," Mouse-ear Dusenberry scoffed, "you're all nuts. Take any good pool player, Slip Risha for instance—why, they'd make them other guys look silly. You see, they got that fine, delicate feel, that perfeck eye—and that's what counts."

EVERYONE was involved in the discussion by that time, with the volume and feeling increasing steadily against the booming background of Foghorn Katz's contributions. As others arrived they chose their sides and joined in and by noon there was a goodly group in each camp except that of the jockey, only three others siding with Prop.

Take any game, Klutch Kelso insisted loudly for the tenth time, that they didn't any of them know about, like—well, like golf, and take all four of them and have a match and the fighter would win so easy it wouldn't be a contest.

"Sure," Klutch said, "I'd bet on him every time."

"Yeah?" Mouse-ear scoffed. "How much? Two bits?"

Prop slowly sat upright with a thoughtful look on his face as he eyed the others.

"Talking don't prove nothing," he said then. "If you want to find out, why don't you have a match? Personally, I'd back a good jock, myself, only arguin' about it don't get anywheres."

"Sure," Snipe Kansas said. "That's right! And if you done it the rassler'd have a pipe. I mean a *pipe*."

So presently they turned from words to actions. After considerable further argument which took until one o'clock, a match was arranged; golf, as Klutch had suggested. Each side nominated contestants until they were agreed on. Young Topaze as the fighter, a nice lightweight; Heavy Ogle the wrestler; Slip Risha the pool-player. Prop nominated Ted Damsky for the jockey, since he was still in town. The other three were present by that time and each readily agreed to represent his field, stating even more vehemently than his backers, if possible, that his natural ability and the background of his profession would make him far outclass the field. With this encouragement, the backers turned rather briskly to the subject of wagers, though there was still somewhat less money than conversation involved.

Prop said he would get hold of Damsky and was sure he would play. "I will be back shortly," he said, "and if Ted will play, I figger I will have a very solid thing and anybody wishing an attractive price will be accommodated."

"Okay, sucker," Fish-eye Yager said gayly. "Hurry back."

Prop departed. An hour went by, and Prop returned, with a roll of money.

"Since I am certain Ted will win," he stated, "there is no point in me offering bets on anyone else. With four entries in the field the odds on one are 1-to-3. Taking a purely nominal percentage for the book," he went on, "I am prepared to offer 2-to-7 on the jock, Ted Damsky, against the field. We will place the money with Joe." That was Joe Murlay, proprietor of the B. & R. C., and Daisy's uncle.

Since the jockey was the least fancied of the four and not there to lend enthusiasm to possible backers, Prop immediately began getting takers.

Daisy, being present, had of course taken in these events, and as time went on and Prop's bets got higher she exhibited signs of nervousness and kept trying to catch his eye and get a word with him, but to no avail. By five that afternoon, the B. & R. C. had become well crowded as usual, and Prop had placed twenty-five hundred dollars and had eight hundred left.

SQUIRE HINKLE arrived about that time and when the match was explained to him, said it sounded very interesting. The Squire was a well-known character in River City, having his fingers in a great many pies, and nearly every time he took his finger out of one of them most of the pie came with it. He was a round, beautifully dressed old boy, suave and gracious of speech, and an unusually good man to have no dealings with whatsoever unless you were tired of not being in serious trouble.

"In fact, Proposition, my boy," the Squire said, "I think I might make a modest wager myself. I rather fancy pool-players, I believe; why don't we arrange a little something just between Slip and your boy Damsky? Say ten dollars a hole. Or, to make it interesting, perhaps a progressive double, based on the total difference in holes at the end of the match. That is, if you win by one hole, ten dollars; by two, twenty dol-

"In fact, Proposition, my boy," the Squire says, "I think I might make a wager myself."

lars a hole; or forty dollars by three—forty dollars a hole, or one hundred and twenty dollars."

Prop thought a moment. He was well aware of what geometric progression could do, but he was also aware of other things too.

"That suits me," he said. "I've got eight hunnerd here. We'll put up eight each. That ought to cover it."

"I expect so," the Squire agreed. "If it doesn't, you know I'm good for any balance, of course. And as for you—" he paused a moment, "—why, I suppose we could add anything extra you lost to our other—er—agreement, couldn't we?"

"I—yeah," Prop said. "I guess so."

That concluded Prop's betting, thirty-three hundred dollars in all. The match was to be played at Sunset Fields, the municipal course, the next day at one o'clock; contestants had the privilege of practicing in the morning if they wished, so they would not be totally unfamiliar with the implements of the game. Leslie MacArthur, pro at Sunset, had agreed by telephone to act as referee.

PROP took Daisy to dinner that night. Having tried to get hold of him all afternoon she became very distant when he suggested dinner and came with reluctance, remarking in addition that Joy Young's was much too expensive a place for him to be taking her.

But Prop remained blithe and ordered two-inch thick steaks for both of them and when the waiter had left them alone in their little booth he looked at her fondly across the table and told her not to worry about a thing.

"All you have got to do," he said, "is to be trying to make up your mind what our colors will be. I will leave this entirely up to you, and I also wish you to understand you will always have a say in everything and I will appreciate your advice at all times."

"Oh, stop talking nonsense!" Daisy said shortly. "I am full of a very heavy feeling of sad disappointment. I know you are somewhat on the squirrelly side but I didn't ever think to see you come completely loose from your wheels like this. Betting over three thousand dollars on a jock in a golf-match! And some of it with the Squire too! If you have three thousand why didn't you tell me so, instead of throwing it away?"

"Well," Prop said, "I didn't have three thousand. I have only five hun-

dred. But when this golden opportunity turns up I cannot afford to let it go, so I get the other."

"Where?" Miss Murlay asked.

"Well," Prop said, "I get it from the Squire, if you must know."

Her look became grim. "How," she asked, "did you get it from the Squire?"

"Well," Prop said, "I give him a marker for it. I give him a marker for three grand and two C's due tomorrow night and he lets me take three grand today."

"But what if you don't have it tomorrow night?"

"Of course I will have it," Prop said confidently, "but if it should so happen I don't, then I will have to train for the Squire at one fifty a month for thirty-two months, while he cancels the marker a C a month. You see the Squire has been after a good trainer who will also take orders for some time, since his last one gets his license taken up, and he has propositioned me several times."

"Oh, Prop!" Miss Murlay wailed. "Oh, you shouldn't have done that. You know what it will mean. Not only will you have to do things you would never do and that will break your heart, but you will not even last out the time, for you are bound to get caught and be barred from every track in the country for life and you know it. You know what the Squire is like and you know he will never get tied up in any of his own dirty work. Oh, Prop, why—why did you do it?"

"Well," Prop said, "five hundred dollars will not start any stables and this is the only way I see to get a quick stake, so I did it. But it will be all right."

"Oh, it won't," Miss Murlay said. "You know it won't. You know the Squire would never bet you that way if he didn't know he would win. You can't win from a man like him. Oh, Prop, go and call off the bets and give the Squire back his money, do you hear? I may even marry you if you do. I can't bear to think of you training for a man like him."

"You know I cannot call off the bets now," Prop said, "but I tell you you do not have to fret, Daisy. Because you see before I bet I talk to Ted a little when I ask him if he will play. It seems it just so happens that in his youth Ted was a caddy sometimes. A caddy," he explained, "is a guy which is a sort of second for a golf-player and carries his sticks and the water-bucket and things. And when he is not caddying Ted says he plays the game a little himself and is not bad and against this field he cannot miss. And he gladly agrees for a small percentage of what we win that he will not talk about his youth to other people. We can't lose."

Daisy was not consoled. "You will," she said. "It doesn't make any difference. I know you will lose." She took out a handkerchief. "You have ruined your life," she sobbed, "and made mine very unhappy and I am not hungry and I wish to go home!"

THE next day was clear and warm and by one o'clock the first tee at Sunset Fields was surrounded by a gallery of nearly two hundred, consisting mostly of fighters, wrestlers, managers, seconds, pool-hustlers, horse-players, etc.

Squire Hinkle, however, was attended by one Lips Livermore, who did a good deal of work for him and was a very ready and able chap in any situation involving the use of lethal weapons; and besides Lips there was also a goodly sprinkling of other individuals whose chief enterprises were on the whole much

less legal than they were stern and forthright. Prop, knowing where to look, quickly detected a considerable number of slight, though telltale bulges under armpits, and indeed Ollie Lavender himself, backing Ogle and having declared himself his handler, turned up carrying a sizable suitcase which Prop was confident did not contain refreshments.

The fact that opinion, backed by wagers, was as strongly divided among this group as among the gallery in general, produced an atmosphere distinctly on the electric side and it was plain that Mr. Leslie MacArthur, the referee, grew steadily more dubious of his honor as the starting time approached. However, since he also felt his resignation might not be graciously accepted, he finally, in nervous tones, called the contestants to the tee and started them.

RISHA drove first, connecting with the ball on his first swing and sending it off in a low slice to the right, some ninety yards. The others followed. Since each had had some practice that morning their efforts now could have been worse. Though not much.

However, the gallery, having no first-hand knowledge of how far or where a golf ball should be hit, sent up admiring exclamations at each shot.

"Cheest, look at it go!"

"He hit it a mile!"

"Attaboy, Heavy! I told you a rassler was the one."

"Yeah? Topaze beat him."

They progressed, gradually, to the first green, with plenty of eagle eyes on each player to be sure his strokes were correctly counted. Prop was caddying for Ted Damsky, who was the only one of the four who had anything resembling a decent golf swing. The satisfaction Prop got from this, however, was somewhat mitigated by the fact that Damsky by no means invariably hit the ball with it, and was in the rough considerably.

Prop helped all he could, giving encouragement and, when Damsky was behind some bushes, standing out in the fairway to give him the line toward the green.

In spite of his misses Damsky holed out with a 12. Risha had 21, Ogle 20 and Topaze 17.

"Nice going," Prop said. "You win the first heat."

But Squire Hinkle had been conferring with MacArthur, and MacArthur now announced:

"Risha wins the first hole. Damsky is disqualified under Rule Four, having had the direction of the hole indicated to him by his caddy standing on the line. Ogle and Topaze are disqualified by Rule Five. The ball must be fairly struck at with the head of the club. You can't use 'em like a pool-cue."

MacArthur was immediately and loudly surrounded and for the next fifteen minutes stood in the center of a vehement protest, nervously and patiently reading and re-reading the rules. However, the Squire, with Lips, was close beside him and backed him up, and since the Squire, if not popular, was at least never taken lightly, the discussion was eventually concluded with resort to no more than words.

"Gee," Prop said to Damsky as they finally moved on. "You wanta watch that. Don't you know the rules?"

"Sure," Damsky said. "Only I didn't think. You know, it's been a long time."

"Well, watch it," Prop repeated. He had noted now that the Squire was carrying a rule-book and it was obvious Risha had been coached; Prop began to feel warmer than the temperature of the day made reasonable.

The second hole was a par three with an island green, with tall rough and trees intervening. Risha had a 20, Damsky 10, Ogle 18 and Topaze a brilliant 11.

After another conference with the Squire, MacArthur reluctantly stated:

"Ogle, Damsky and Topaze lose the hole from infraction of Rule Fifteen, having improved position of ball by bending, breaking or otherwise moving anything fixed or growing."

THE uproar that greeted this made the one on the first green seem no more than a mild, academic discussion, and when, after thirty loud, heated minutes, they finally moved on to the third tee, with Risha grudgingly admitted the winner, MacArthur had about him a limp, jittery look.

The third hole was played. The third green nestled among nine different traps and each player found one or more of them before he holed out. Risha 18, Damsky 12, Ogle 19, Topaze 17.

Squire Hinkle looked about for the referee. Others looked about for the referee. He was not there. Mr. MacArthur, quietly, secretly, but completely, had resigned.

"Oh, well," the Squire said equably, "it doesn't matter. I have a rule-book

"No, you don't," Fish-eye Yager broke in. "You don't get away with it this time!"

and it's quite plain. I'm afraid Slip wins again. You see Rule Twenty-five says, 'when a ball lies in or touches a hazard the club shall not touch the ground nor shall anything be touched or moved before the player strikes the ball.' Well, all of you were in hazards and all except Slip grounded their clubs, so of course he wins."

Something very similar to the sound track of a moving-picture mob scene run backwards and increased nine times in volume welled out upon the country-side.

"Oh, no you don't! Not this time!"

"Whaddaya mean, hazard? I don't see no hazards."

The Squire remained calm and patient, passing the book around here and there. The rule was read and re-read, hashed and re-hashed. But no one could deny what it said and no one could point to any violation of the rules on Slip's part.

"But we been doing that all the time," Young Topaze protested. "Why didn't you say nothing before?"

The Squire shrugged. "It wasn't necessary," he said. "There were other infractions."

Eventually, sullenly, Risha was conceded the hole.

"Lemme have that rule-book a minute," Fish-eye Yager requested as they moved to the fourth tee. "I wanta study up on something."

"My dear Fish-eye," the Squire said, "I'd love to, but I need it. You see, I'll have to be referee now and since no one else knows the rules I must have it handy for reference."

"Oh, no, you aint!" Fish-eye stated in cold firm tones. "You aint got a chancet to be referee."

It was well-known that when Fish-eye got serious about something he had an extremely firm and fearless nature, and he was now immediately backed up by everyone not betting on Risha. For a time it seemed there might be a deadlock, but after about twenty minutes—during which Fish-eye had dispatched Limpy Mellas to the clubhouse to bring back every rule-book he could lay hands on—it was agreed that there would be four referees, one for each player, and that a vote of the three not betting on a man would decide as to whether he had broken a rule or not.

Limpy returned with fourteen rule-books and each referee was given one and the rest distributed among more important members of each camp.

They moved to the fourth hole.

PROP, carrying Damsky's clubs and reading a rule-book at the same time, could not keep his mind from also fearfully toying with what ten dollars doubled eighteen times and multiplied by eighteen would come to, nor from realizing that whatever it was, at one hundred a month it would take him the rest of his life plus several billion years to cancel it, which was a long time to be in the Squire's employ.

As they moved slowly through the fourth hole he read the rules frantically, checking everything Damsky did as well as he could, before each shot, and when

they finally came to the green he thought he had kept him in the clear.

When they had all holed out—Risha 20, Topaze 17, Damsky 10 and Ogle 20—there was a long minute of ominous silence.

The Squire blandly broke it.

"Well," he said, "it seems Slip wins again. Too bad, when it's just a technicality—but rules are rules, you know. Damsky, you see, drew his putter along the line of his putt and—"

"Wait just a minute!" Prop yelled. "Where's that? Where do you get—"

"Rule Twenty-eight," the Squire said, "Paragraph Three: 'The line of the putt must not be touched—'"

"Damn it, damn it, damn it," Prop wailed. "Twenty-eight, I didn't get that far yet. I don't see—"

"And Topaze," the Squire went on, "did the same thing and also—"

"No, you don't!" Fish-eye Yager broke in suddenly, moving close to the Squire. "You don't get away with it this time. I got a bellyful of your rules. . . . Anyhow, what about Slip? I seen him—"

"Looky here," Itchy Iboze said suddenly. "It says here—wait a minute—" he thumbed the pages, "—it's right here and—"

Fog-horn Katz drowned him out:

"RULE 10. IRREGULARITIES OF SURFACE WHICH COULD IN ANY WAY AFFECT THE PLAYER'S STROKE SHALL NOT BE—"

"Yeah, and what about this?" Klutch Kelso said, shouldering his way into the group. "It says here, 'The term "loose impediments" denotes any ob—'"

NAMES began to be bandied about. The Squire cast a glance over his shoulder and motioned Lips Livermore closer with his eyebrows.

"Boys," the Squire said, "it's perfectly simple. If you just listen to me a moment and—"

"Listen to you, hell," Fish-eye said. "I been waiting a long time to tell you just what kind of a Joe you are, and now I am in the frame of mind to do it. You are a—"

Fish-eye was hardly well started on what kind of Joe he thought the Squire was when his voice was drowned out by what others thought the Squire was, plus a good many things they thought each other were also, various individuals paring off and making it purely personal, while some just gave vent in a broad, unexclusive fashion.

Lips Livermore moved closer to the Squire, edgily.

ABOUT four o'clock that afternoon Miss Daisy Murlay got a telephone-call from Proposition Pete McGill. After some conversation she was convinced that he was in earnest and agreed to do as he asked.

She told her Uncle Joe she had to go out for a little while and he took over the cigar-counter and cashier's desk for her. She put on her hat and went down to the street and took a taxi to the Union Station, where, some ten minutes later, she was sitting in one corner of the coffee-shop with Prop.

"But if it wasn't finished," she was saying, "I don't see what you're talking about. You can't *win* anything, that's certain, and if Slip was four holes ahead of Damsky then—"

"I am trying to tell you," Prop broke in, "and if you will just give me a little time I will. I don't lose anything, account of I told your Uncle Joe if the match is not finished he is to call off all bets and return the money. So he will give the Squire the three G's and two C's that is coming to him, and give you the other C. So that's all right."

"But that does not buy any automobile and trailer, of which you spoke over the phone, let alone any horses to put in the trailer," Daisy said, "and I do not see why you get me down here just so as to—"

"I keep telling you," Prop said, "that if you will just let me tell you I will tell you. I will cover the rest of it briefly, because it is about time for my train and I do not wish to miss it for various reasons."

He paused a moment to arrange the events in his mind. "Well," he said, "like I say, everybody is pretty much on edge by this time. Everybody is arguing around with everybody else, calling each other different things, and Fish-eye is still going strong on what he thinks of the Squire. And Lips keeps edging up closer and closer to the Squire and about then, as Fish-eye is sort of polishing off what he has said he sees Lips' hand sort of edging across his vest and of course he knows what for.

"Well, as you know, Fish-eye is not a man who takes anything off of anybody, and when he sees that he calls Lips a few little things and says, 'Why, you yellow-bellied punk, don't you pull no rod on me!' But as you also know,

Lips is of a nervous temperament and always very eager for action anyhow, and when Fish-eye says this and sort of halfway reaches for his own betsy, Lips hauls out and there they are standing, with rods in their hands facing each other.

"Now also all through the crowd, when they hear Fish-eye say 'rod' many of the others produce their own at that time, just instinctively like, you might say, and so besides Fish-eye and Lips there is now maybe thirty or forty guys standing around with rods in their hands looking at each other, and I do not need to tell you that when two guys which are both somewhat excited anyhow are standing and looking at each other with rods in their hands they do not flip coins to see which is going to send first.

"Personally I think it is Lips that is the first one, but I cannot be sure, for when there is one shot there is immediately so many other shots that it sounds like somebody blows up a whole store full of ammunition, and very quickly there is not anybody in sight at all. The peaceful-minded individuals, like myself—with me well in front—scatter in all directions very fast and the others, after the first round or two, jump behind trees and into traps—those are big holes with sand in them—and they are continuing from these positions as I pass out of sight. The last thing I hear is Ollie Lavender's Thompson gun slapping out a couple of trial bursts before he gets down to serious business.

"So," Prop concluded, "there you are, and I do not lose any money, except the two C's interest to the Squire and that does not matter due to the way things work out, and so everything is fine." He was struggling with a large bundle of papers as he said this and finally managed to get them from his pocket. "All you have to do," he said, "is collect on these and then come on and meet me in—"

"Collect on what?" Daisy said. She reached out for the bundle of papers and looked at them curiously. "What are these things, anyhow?"

"WELL," Prop said, "I have an idea maybe this match will get the boys a little bit excited, you see, and that maybe it will end this way, so yesterday I take my other two hundred dollars and go see a man I know and he makes me a very pretty rate, just for five hours, on about eighty of those who will be present—just straight life-and-accident with double indemnity when caused by gunshot wounds. Those are the policies and they are made out to you as the bene—bene—they are in your name."

DAISY was looking blankly from the stack of policies to Prop.

"You—" she gulped, "—you say you got in—insurance on—"

"Of course, I didn't want to see anybody get hurt bad," Prop admitted, "let alone knocked off, and I hoped it would just go through peaceful. But," he said, "at the same time it seems like a very good gamble, especially at the price he gives me and I could not afford to pass it up. As a matter of fact," he added, "I don't expect more than maybe just a very few did get knocked off, but we'll be all right anyhow. I counted anyhow two-three grand just in accidents, while I was leaving, and they hadn't really got started good then."

"Well," Daisy said philosophically, after a moment, "I do not suppose anybody is getting shot who is not shooting at somebody else, but what I cannot see is—how did you happen to think of it?"

"Well," Prop said modestly, "it's just that in a set-up of this kind you have got to play all the angles, is all. Like," he added, "me going on ahead now and having the policies made out for you. Course it would probably be all right, but on the other hand some of the boys are somewhat touchy sometimes and might be hurt or even maybe suspicious if they find out I had made a profit on them, whereas nobody will mind at all if it is you, and they will gladly testify as to their injuries." He glanced up at the clock on the wall and got suddenly to his feet. "It is time for my train," he said, "and we had better go."

"Well," Daisy said as they went out through the waiting-room and headed toward the gates, "I am glad you have fixed things so I can marry you, for besides liking the idea very much in general you have also proved yourself very resourceful and I do not think I will ever have to worry—much." She tucked a hand fondly through his arm. "I do not suppose," she added with mild curiosity, "that you happen to know for sure anybody an accident has happened to?"

"No," Prop said, "I don't. But I know something else: there is a certain party if anything happens to him we are rich. On the Squire," he explained, "I took out an extra big one, both ways. Just sort of for luck, you know."

KEEPER

A NOVELETTE

"THERE is a ship," wrote the late Heywood Broun in the New York World-Telegram. "It is called the St. Louis. If suddenly the vessel flashed an S.O.S. to indicate that the crew and the 900 passengers were in danger, every other steamer within call would go hurrying to the rescue. That is the rule of the sea. . . .

"But there is a ship. It carries 900 passengers—men, women and small children. And they are in peril . . . which threatens not only their lives but their very souls and spiritual freedom. It would be better for them by far if the St. Louis had ripped its plates in a collision with some other craft, or if an impersonal iceberg had slashed the hull below the water-line.

"Then there would be not the slightest hesitation in a movement of all the allied fleets to save these members of the human race in deep and immediate distress.

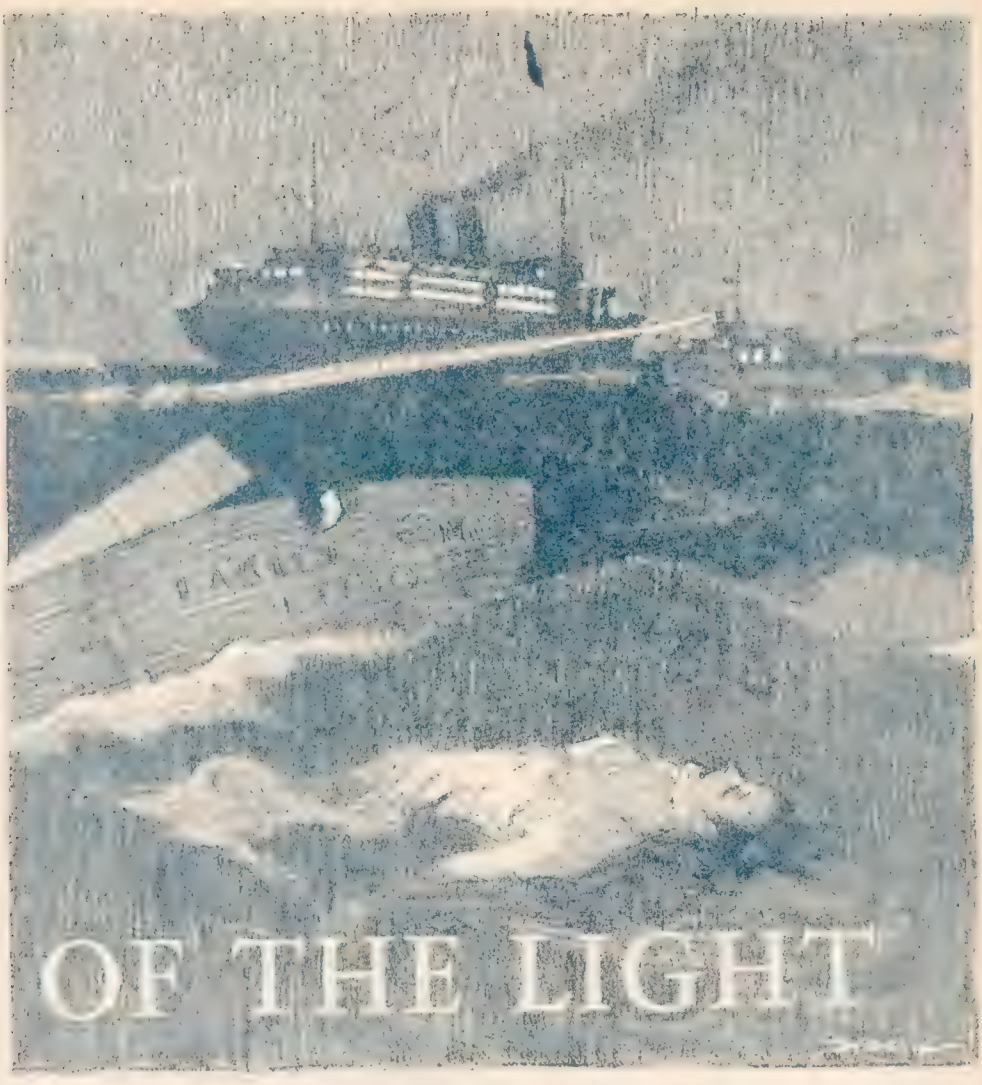
"But this is not an iceberg, or a plate which has been ripped away. . . . It is not an accident of nature but an inhuman equation which has put them in deadly peril. . . .

"And so the whole world stuffs its ears and pays no attention to any wireless.

"There is a ship. And almost two thousand years have elapsed since the message of universal brotherhood was brought to earth.

"What have we done with that message? What price civilization?"

This is the story of another such ship—and of a lighthouse-keeper in Central America who became the liberator of his country.



OF THE LIGHT

By WILLIAM BYRON MOWERY

EXCEPT for his tame wild doves, Hannibal lived alone and liked it, on Bat Isle. From the door of his cabin he could look out across ten miles of blue tidal rip, as lovely and wicked as a woman, and see all he wanted to see of the gleaming city of All Saints.

Hannibal was an obscurity in the Service of Navigation. For eleven dollars a month he kept two ten-second beacons infallibly in operation, so that the ships of the world could pass safely through one of the most dangerous straits in the Caribbean.

Each sunset a cloud of bats poured like a puff of smoke from a cave above Hannibal's cabin, and whooped it across to the mainland of the republic. There they dispersed themselves over the fields of cane and tobacco, and ate bugs. During this bat dusk Hannibal would row out to his beacons, groom them, and oil the wave-engine machinery.

All the world, including Hannibal himself, considered that Hannibal was of those who are born one a minute. His clever cousin Arturo, a waxing politician and master of the census, called him "Coo-coo," not altogether because of his doves. And, of course Rafael Ferron, the iron man of the republic, had never heard Hannibal's name or even knew he existed.

But Hannibal knew plenty about the iron man. Who didn't? All the radios blared *"Viva Ferron!"* half-hourly; newspapers carried Ferron's picture daily in a front-page laurel box; posters of him

Illustrated by Raymond Sisley

were hung all over the republic. Every home had to exhibit a portrait of Ferron —or else!

Hannibal's dog-eared library comprised about a dozen volumes, the great books of the ages, from the Bible on down. At a sanitary distance from them on the shelf stood a copy of Ferron's terrific book, "My Battle Upward," wherein Hannibal recognized himself as one of those whom Ferron called "the stupid herd" in one sentence and "my dear fellow-racials" in the next.

Before Hannibal's time other men had held the Bat Isle beacon job; and on its eleven dollars a month they had built mansions for themselves in All Saints and sent their children to school in France. They were the superiors among men. On dark nights when gales were howling they would move the beacons close ashore, and then they had lush salvaging when misguided ships broke to pieces on the rocks—somewhat as the Yanquis used to do at Key West.

But Ferron had stopped this quaint practice; it hurt the republic's trade and therefore his graft. Besides, Hannibal was not clever enough for such stratagems. He was forever getting ethics mixed up with the practical problems of living and waxing prosperous.

ONE evening Hannibal carried his light cockle into the surf and rowed over the rocks to the first beacon. The main bat rush had passed. A few stragglers still flittered overhead, mostly old decrepits, and mothers burdened with batkins clinging to their breast fur. Also there were some frivolous ones who, plainly, would pursue no bugs that night. These gyrating pairs aroused a certain loneliness in Hannibal. After all, he was but thirty, and husky enough to lick a dozen panty-waists like cousin Arturo.

While the dusk came on, Hannibal oiled and slicked up the first beacon. The other was a mile away, across the main channel; and the tide was seething through as if it had some important place to go. After hoisting his tiny sail and spitting contemptuously into the current, Hannibal took up his oars and started across.

The ship was only a mile north when he noticed it. At first he paid no attention, except to row a little harder to get out of the behemoth's way. But as the ship drew nearer, Hannibal sensed something queer about her.

The vessel was huge but a generation old. Her lines were unquestionably Baltic. She was gayly lighted, and was being navigated through the straits by veteran sea-skill. But unlike the tide, she seemed to have no place to go at all. Bucking the rip at half steam, she was standing slowly and aimlessly toward the low southern Wolf.

Safely past mid-channel, Hannibal threw out his anchor and stood up, wide-legged, watching. He had never before seen a ship-mood like that of this vessel's, and he swore in bewilderment as the liner plowed past him, two hundred yards away.

Besides the festal blaze of lights, a band aboard the vessel was discoursing lively music; but no one danced. Steward crews hustled among the thousand passengers, bearing panniers of fruit and drink, all free; but no one took of the

offerings. On the main aft promenade, where the throng was thickest, an elderly man at a loud-speaker was exhorting his fellow passengers to courage, in the name of the God of Israel. No one listened to him.

Behind the liner the usual pod of scavenger sharks rolled and sliced. Back of them followed a motor-launch, playing a searchlight over the vessel's wake.

In spite of the gay blare, the big ship seemed as quiet as a ghost's tomb. The silence of a thousand silent people drowned all the noise. The ship itself was like the wraith of a vessel—an aimless wanderer bound for no port on this earth.

Utterly bewildered by what he had seen, Hannibal rowed on to the second beacon, groomed it, worked south a mile for tide advantage, and started home. The big liner by then was two leagues off his starboard, but evidences of her were dancing down the current. By his gas-lantern Hannibal saw galley refuse, fruit-skins and other flotsam bobbing along in the wavy phosphorescence.

In the mid-channel a blob of filmy seaweed flowed into his lantern-light and swirled past him. The break of a wave disclosed some object like a woman's shoe, some dab of clothing like a woman's dress. Hannibal jumped up; then another wave broke just right, and Hannibal yelled.

In the next instant he grabbed his oars again, and went skirling down-tide —chasing that blob that wasn't seaweed.

HANNIBAL dragged the woman into his cockle, laying her across a thwart so that the water would run out of her lungs. How the searchlight and sharks had missed her was a mystery to him. In that hissing tide he had no time even to find out, just then, if she was alive or dead.

By a hot battle he got back to Bat Isle, lugged boat and woman ashore, then toted the woman up-slope to his cabin, where he laid her on his cot and struck a light. He still didn't know whether she was alive. But she looked too beautiful and vital to be dead, and so he began pumping her arms, up and down.

A faint color crept into the woman's cheeks. Hannibal put his big ear over her heart and heard a slow *thuup-uuh-thuup*. Then came a rattle of breath in her throat.

Pausing to catch his own breath, Hannibal gazed at his strange salvaging. The woman was in her early twenties. Her silky brown hair gleamed wetly in the lamplight. Her sodden dress showed the lithe body of a *danseuse*. Hannibal realized he should take off her dripping clothes and wrap her in warm blankets; but he was afraid she'd come to while he was disrobing her. So he began pumping her arms again.

SOON afterward, the girl's eyes flickered open. Like a newborn baby, or a person who'd just been looking into the unfathomable dark of death, she stared vacantly at Hannibal, and around her at his clean and spacious cabin.

Hannibal possessed a bottle of King's Delight which Arturo had given him at last election. He poured a jigger into a glass and dosed the girl, his hand under her head.

The raw liquor did the trick in a hurry. She choked on it and almost strangled, but it jolted her wide awake.

"I hope," Hannibal said, "that the señorita will find herself fully recovered promptly."

The girl looked at him sharply. Her lovely brown eyes could, as the Granada saying goes, thrust swords at one.

"Who are you?" she demanded. Her Spanish was fluent enough, but thick with a Teutonic accent. "Where am I?"

Hannibal bowed and tried to click his heels, but this was a failure, for he was barefooted. "I am Hannibal Escreban, who had the honor to find you in the sea and bring you here to this your cabin."

"You meddler! Why did you do that? Why didn't you leave me alone?"

Her words told Hannibal what he'd already guessed: she had deliberately plunged herself off that sad old ship because she had wanted to die. What was worse, she still wanted to die. Death had held her in his arms, and she had found the oblivion sweet.

She began crying hysterically. Hannibal backed away from her and prayed she would stop. When she didn't he lighted the brazier and made a hot crab broth. But she flung the gourd-bowl to the floor. He brought her his white blanket, for the night trade-wind had a chill edge. She pushed the blanket away.

She cried for one full hour by Hannibal's old chronometer. He could remember no man or woman, not even those earthquake survivors years ago, who cried so heartbrokenly.

When exhaustion finally quieted her, Hannibal made more broth and ap-

proached the cot timidly. "Please, my poor friend!" In the face of her prostration, he dropped the elegant language. "I'm sorry I rescued you. But it's done now. Forgive me, and perhaps please sip of this."

Though she accepted a few swallows of broth and let him put the white blanket around her shoulders, Hannibal did not like the way her eyes followed him. But he understood her fears. His rope belt, bare feet, canvas pants and fish-net cap made him seem a swarthy buccaneer, lost to scruples.

GOING over to a cupboard, he took out the old horse-pistol with which he discouraged the caco-hawks that bothered his doves. The gun wasn't loaded; no danger she'd use it on herself.

"Here," he said, handing her the weapon. "You're afraid of me. Keep this at ready, and then you won't feel so afraid."

She looked at Hannibal for what seemed a long time. Finally she said: "You're deep water, whoever you are."

"Deep, nothing," Hannibal scoffed. "The deeps have sharks and other unknowns in them. Me, I'm a shallow puddle, and transparent as All Saints gin."

"But who are you?"

Hannibal placed a chair at a reassuring distance from the cot and briefly told her of himself: Of his lowly childhood on a great sugar estate. Of Cousin Arturo, who had risen above the Escreban station, and prospered, and secured him this job. Of the beacons, doves, bats; of his garden and arbors.

"And now," he inquired, "who are you?"

The girl said bitterly: "I am not even an obscurity, such as you claim to be. I am untouchable: one-quarter of my blood, hence *all* of me, is a human vileness. The very air we breathe is thereby rendered unfit for the proud race of my *patria*."

To Hannibal, this was nonsense, but it had a familiar sound. In the book of Rafael Ferron occurred sentiments like those. They clashed with the gentle Testament, and with all the great teachings of the ages. It seemed to him the world was going lunatic from listening to such arguments.

To reassure the girl, Hannibal said: "In this cabin and on my islet you are indeed untouchable. May I inquire your Christian name?"

"It's not Christian. It also is vile. It is—Esther."

Hannibal seemed to remember an Esther who once danced before kings. This present Esther, he felt was also an eyeful for a king. She was learned; she was lovely; and one who possessed such depths of despair must also know mountain-heights of ecstasy.

Through the doorway came the thrum of a launch. Hannibal stepped over and looked out. The craft, about a mile south, was playing its search-beam over the water and working nearer. By the assembly of its lights Hannibal recognized the craft as a launch of the Navigation, out of All Saints harbor.

In a flash he knew that the boat was hunting for his beautiful bit of flotsam. She had been discovered missing, or someone had seen her jump; and radio-crackles had done the rest.

He turned to Esther. "I'd better go down to the land-wash and talk to that party." He put out the light. "If you hear a gull mew three times, slip out of this cabin and hide among my papayas till all's clear."

He strode down toward the sea edge. As the launch came nosing in over the black rocks, its searchlight studied him and his cockle near by.

"Ahoy, stupid!" a voice hailed. Hannibal recognized it as that of Corporal Guadalupe, his immediate superior in the Navigation. "What's that boat of yours doing there where the tide at full would lick it away?"

HANNIBAL could have kicked himself for this oversight. Sharp eyes, the corporal had, and even sharper suspicions.

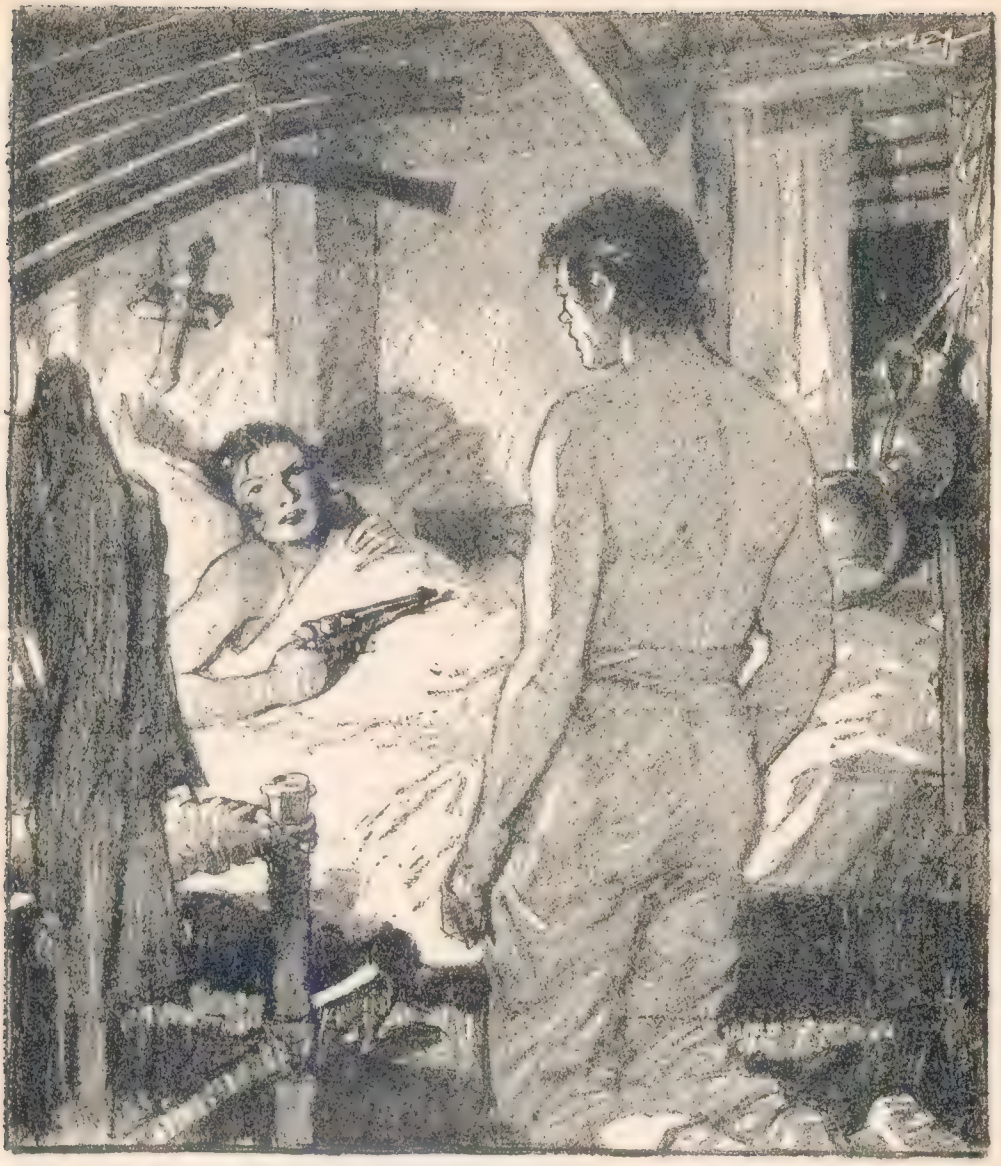
"My boat—ah, yes, Señor Caporal," he answered. "It is in readiness to return to the beacon yonder, where I have an adjustment—"

"Shut up. When you traversed this channel at dusk, did you observe anything unusual?"

"A Baltic liner passed, followed by a launch. Is there some trouble, Señor Caporal?"

"A mountain of it! Listen, dolt: Keep an eye on this landwash, and on these black rocks when the tide ebbs. If you discover anything, report at once. Any monkey business out of you in this matter, and you'll find yourself being toasted."

The launch swung back toward mid-channel. Hannibal headed up for his cabin, pleased at turning the party away. Undoubtedly the hunt for Esther would



She said: "You're deep water, whoever you are."

tail off and stop, and she'd be reported as in the bosom of the ocean or the belly of a tiger-shark. . . .

In the cabin Esther, blanket-wrapped, was drying her clothing at the brazier.

After much hesitation, because it was none of his business, Hannibal asked her: "They are hunting you hotly—why?"

"It's nothing I've done, or any of us have done. They're merely afraid that one of us might swim ashore—through those waters and those sharks!—and find asylum in your republic."

"But I see no calamity in that."

"You must be stupid."

"Of a certainty. Many thanks."

"Your republic is not alone in being inhospitable. Not a nation of the New World will let us land. As for yourself personally, don't you see that you're breaking the law of your country by harboring me?"

Hannibal nodded; then he said:

"I see. But it would break a law of my God to give you to the dogs."

"*What?*" Astonished at his answer, Esther came over to the doorway. "You *are* deep water. I don't understand you. That officer was suspicious. He threatened to 'toast' you."

"He first has to catch me," Hannibal said. He thrust out his chest a little. "In simple affairs, such as hiding you here, I'm not so dumb. It may be I'm suspected, but I don't give a *pfui*. I can hide you safely—even on this dinky

island. I've been revolving in my mind a way to do it. Shall I explain?"

"Before you do, let me ask a question."

"Of a certainty. Ask a hundred."

Esther confronted him. The wan starlight fell on her face, and she wasn't smiling. "Look! I'm a stranger to you. A pick-up from the sea. Yet you offer to get into trouble for my sake." She paused, and her eyes really thrust swords. "Omit your empty references to God, dago! What sort of payment from me do you expect in return? Let us have that thoroughly understood."

HANNIBAL backed away as though Esther were slapping him. He tried to answer, but choked. Angrily, he took a turn or two around the cabin, in the grand manner, while he cogitated a reply, and his anger cooled a little. Finally he stopped and faced the beautiful one.

"What sort of people have you lived your life among, girl? They must've been relatives of the shark. You can't even conceive of a kindness that is offered without thought of pay! Under the stone of my friendliness you expect to find an adder. Shame on you! No, shame on the life you came from! You must have lifted many stones and found many adders."

Esther tried to interrupt him, but he went on with his philippic:

"So I'm a dago, am I? I am, and proud of it! The people throughout my *patria* are likewise dagoes. *They* aren't hounding you. They're plain humans—shallow puddles like me. If you'd show up at their cane-brake *bohiós*, homeless and hungry, they'd take you in; they'd give you their last bite of grub, the last puff on the cigar that hangs from the ceiling. Is your insulting question now answered?"

Slowly Esther hung her head. "May I ask your forgiveness?"

"Well, I'm glad you're at ease on that matter. We've got more to do than spit angry seeds at each other. We have, as the Cubans say, two strikes on us: One, you're hunted. Two, this islet will be watched. If we don't walk as on eggshells, I'll get toasted, and you'll be—"

"—Returned to my *patria*," Esther completed. "And I'd rather be toasted than that."

"Is your family, perhaps, on the old liner?" Hannibal asked. In reality he was wondering if Esther had a husband. That question even then was of moment to him.

"My family?" Esther intoned, in the quiet voice of utter tragedy. "Both my father and mother, aged and broken by suffering, are dead. Mercifully so. I had two brothers, but where they were taken or whether they still live, I know not. All my near relatives are dead or missing. All my friends are scattered, dead, lost. The family property was seized, my dancing proscribed. Facing personal degradations, I fled blindly on the old liner, with the others, not knowing where we were going. We came across to the New World. But no government would grant us refuge. Hope died; as I faced returning to terrors of the *patria*, I—I plunged from the ship."

Hannibal had read of those events across the sea. They had seemed far off, and fantastic. Now here stood one of their victims, in his cabin. She stood alone on earth, without kin, friends, money, haven; with only the protection of his obscure self.

A great pity shook Hannibal to his depths. He laid his hand gently on Esther's shoulder.

"Poor one," he said simply, "I will be your friend—to the utmost; to my life, if necessary."

THROUGHOUT that night Hannibal sat in the doorway, alert for boats and lights. At gray dawn he stepped over to the cot and roused Esther, hurriedly.

"Come alive! A launch of the Navigation is approaching."

Esther rubbed at her sleepy eyes. "W-w-what did you say?"

"Quickly!" He grabbed up the white blanket, in which he had already wrapped items of food and drink. "I've got to hide you. This boat is nearing the isle. We must hurry."

He hustled Esther from the cabin and through his papaya arbor, and they headed up-slope.

The night wind had died. A heavy dew dripped from the fruit-trees and Hannibal's adolescent coco-palms. The sea, what little of it was visible, lay mirror-quiet, and the surf was a whisper. It was a beautiful hour, of life gently awakening, doves cooing in the hardwoods, and cane sparrows lifting up their madrigals like little spirals of song.

A gray water-smoke blanketed the straits, but out of the fog came the ugly thrum of a big launch, nosing in to Bat Isle. The sound jolted all the sleepiness out of Esther.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked.

"No questions now. You'll be safe where I put you. The devil with a lantern couldn't find you there. But hurry!"

The tiny island sloped up rather precipitously from the sea. It was crowned with a four-acre patch of hardwoods, a little *bosque* tangled with lianas, and lush with riotous growth. A footpath, trampled hard long before Hannibal's time, led into the miniature jungle.

FIFTY steps deep in the woods, Hannibal and Esther came to a ledge of ancient rock. There, at a blackish hole, a door-slit in the ledge, the footpath ended.

Hannibal said: "This is the cave of the bats. They've returned home by now. You'll see them by the hundreds, by the thousands, down in there. But they won't hurt you. They'll merely *squeak-squeak* sleepily as you pass."

He thrust the blanket and a flashlight into Esther's hands. "Listen to me closely: This entrance-way slants down into the bowels of this isle. Go down, down, till you strike a level floor. Turn right, there, and count your steps. Make them full man-steps. At eleven paces you'll see a conch-shell imbedded in the wall on your right. Push on the shell, hard, and a door will open. Go boldly into the dark vault that discloses itself, and shut the door behind you. The vault is a hiding-place that one of my predecessors contrived, to secrete valuables of his salvaging. It's dank and cold, but safe. Stay there till I come for you."

He whirled and ran back the path. At the woods' edge he broke a heavy branch from an ebony tree, and dragged it after him down the trail, erasing Esther's shoe-marks.

The launch was looming out of the fog as he darted into his cabin. In the sand floor Esther's heel-prints were plain. Hannibal obliterated them with a few swipes of a palm broom, and shook her impression out of the cot. To his mind the fragrance of her lingered betrayingly in the whole abode—an intangible that he could not get rid of.

After tousling his hair as though he'd just got up from sleep, he slouched across to the door and looked out. Too large to come in over the rocks, the launch had anchored near the beacon, and a surf-boat was driving ashore, bringing a party of ten. The leader this time was no corporal but a full-spangled captain.

Confident that the authorities had nothing on him and would get nothing, Hannibal walked down the slope and met the party at the landwash.

Ignoring his salute, the captain bluntly demanded:

"Where's that woman?"

Hannibal assumed an air of bewilderment. "W-woman? Of what does the Señor Capitán speak?"

The captain wasted no time arguing. At his gesture two men led Hannibal to a spot of level hard sand, and placed on the sand two scallop-shells about the size of a policeman's badge. The captain drew his sword and pressed the sharp point against Hannibal's breastbone.

"Kneel down on those, worm. Stay knelt till you change your stubborn-donkey mind. Corporal Innes, take charge of him. I'll set my men to combing this place; then I'll come back and attend to him personally."

When the captain and his squad were out of earshot, Corporal Innes inquired:

"How do the knees feel?"

"Not bad *yet*, thanks."

"Until Spangles returns, lean back and take the weight on your toes."

"Many thanks. I perceive you're a stupid too."

"What's that?"

"It's stupid to be kind when there's nothing in it for you."

Innes eyed him puzzledly. "You talk queerly, fellow. You've been living here alone too long in monkish meditations. But listen: you'd better talk. They're going to toast you till you do."

"Talk about what?"

"Last twilight you pulled a woman, one of the refugees, out of the tide. Or so it is said."

"Who says so?"

"A barracuda-fisherman reported that he saw you pull *something* out."

SILENTLY Hannibal swore. That white-light lantern of his could be seen a mile! And his cursed luck—not one night in a barrelful of nights would a barracuda-fisherman be abroad in that seething tide!

Still, they didn't know positively that he'd salvaged Esther. And they'd never know. Not from his lips. For two forevers, they could toast him!

He asked Innes: "What's happened with that refugee liner?"

"It's still butting along our coasts, with our launches on its tail."

Hannibal perceived that harboring one of those refugees, or even the suspicion of doing so, was a serious matter. If he

He thrust an envelope at Esther. "Your papers: Read and find out who you are."

got thrown into jail, Esther would be helplessly alone on the islet. After thinking over this danger carefully, he said to Innes:

"When you get back to All Saints, friend, do me the favor to whisper to Arturo Escreban, master of the census, that I must see him."

"Okay. But what's he to you?"

"Blood-cousin."

"Astonishing! I'll bear your message."

The captain returned with his squad. Lolling in front of Hannibal, the officer lighted a cigarette. He had a most confident mien, as though positive now of his ground.

Hannibal had to put all his weight on his knees, and speedily the pain grew. Sweat began beading his face. An imp of Satan was plunging knives into his back, and other imps were sawing his legs off. He cursed scallop-shells. Never again would he regard fledgling scallops, gay troops of red and lavender in the shallows, as butterflies of the sea.

The sun rose. Always it had seemed to jump out of the mighty Atlantic. This time it dragged like footsteps mounting a guillotine-block. But Hannibal pictured a girl sitting in a dark vault: a helpless, homeless girl, solely dependent on him; and that picture helped him clench his fists and his jaw. . . .

At the end of twenty deadlocked minutes, the captain impatiently flipped his cigarette away. "Will you bray now, donkey?"

"I've nothing to talk about, Señor Capitán."

"You haven't? Take a look at this bit of proof." He thrust some small object before Hannibal's eyes. "This was found in your hut, in the sand near the head of the cot!"

The object was a hairpin.

"Well!" the captain snapped. "Start chattering, monkey. Where is she?"

Hannibal could think in a hurry when he had to; and this was one of those times. He said:

"She is back in All Saints, Señor Capitán. I beg you to believe that this incident did not interfere with my duties at the beacons. I brought her in the night and returned her in the night."

"She? Who?"

Hannibal hung his head in shame. "She was one of the nameless ones from the alleys behind the Plaza."

The captain dropped the hairpin and brushed his hands. The men snickered among themselves at Hannibal's folly. Corporal Innes helped the lie along:

"Señor Capitán, if I may speak—three nights ago I did see this dolt at All

Saints. He was leaving the banana pier, and he had a woman of the sort he confesses to."

The captain glared. "Apparently the hairpin is explained, donkey. But I still believe you may know something about the refugee woman. We must find out whether you do." He turned to Innes. "Corporal, bring the strand whip from the launch. Ortego, fetch a basin of salt water, to dip the whip in, between strokes."

IT was mid-morning when the party got through with Hannibal and climbed into their boat.

Pain-giddy, Hannibal stumbled along toward his cabin. The coral beach seemed to be loping crazily, like the waves of the ocean. A tramp steamer plodding through the straits seemingly whirled and pirouetted in a solo rhumba.

But for all his pain and welts, the morning was bright and the sky was blue, to Hannibal. He had kept his mouth shut and saved Esther. He was free now—unless more suspicion arose and they toasted him again.

"Mother of mercies," he thought, wincing, "another toasting would be cruelly worse. In the old *morro* dungeon yonder they used to have methods of making even the dead talk."

From the jungle trees his unfed doves descended upon him. Hannibal removed them from his shoulders and arms. "No, pink-feet! No, *palomas!* I'm not in a fondling mood, and I've a hopperful of things to do."

In the cabin he brewed a pot of coffee and drank it all, black and hot. After sponging himself, he combed his hair, put on a shirt to hide his back, and hurried up the jungle trail to the cave mouth.

Deep in the rock vault he found Esther sitting on an old sea trunk, the white blanket around her. She sprang up eagerly.

"Can we leave? This place oppresses like a tomb. The hours seemed months."

"They did drag a trifle. But the party's gone."

"What did they do to you?"

"Oh, a few inconveniences. Come with me."

He led Esther from the vault, along the passageway where the bats by the hundreds plastered the rock, and up the steep slant to the golden sunshine.

"You must not return to the cabin or show yourself in the open till dusk," he said. "They've got spy-glasses at All Saints. But I know a spot where you'll be comfortable."

Halfway down the path, he cut aside from the regular trail, pushed through the undergrowth a dozen yards, and led Esther into a tiny clearing.

He himself, three years ago, had chopped out the clearing with a machete. The size of a large room, the grotto had walls of jungle greenery a hundred feet high, and a patch of blue heaven for a ceiling. The moss which he had brought from the mainland had spread over the floor like a carpet. The few sprigs of *cadena d'amor* which he had stuck down around the walls had grown monstrously, had shot up the trees toward the high blue; and their chains of bloom were like orange flame.

Esther stopped with a gasp. "Oh—oh! Did *you* make this?"

"At my suggestion, Nature did. Please dispose yourself here. I must leave. There are precautionary moves to make. The camel smells the desert and drinks for the future."

"What desert do you smell?"

"Who knows what will come? Safety is better than regret."

"But can't you stay with me here, a little while? That cave was unwordably lonesome."

As Hannibal spread the blanket for Esther to sit upon, he rejoiced in her glad "Oh's" and "Ah's" at the lianas and snowy orchids. Visibly she was climbing out of her black pit and discovering some zest in life again.

Properly planted, he reflected, this refugee girl would flourish like one of those sprigs of *cadena d'amor*. But it would have to be a complete transplantation, in the soil of the New World. Her past life was dead beyond resurrection.

ESTHER'S voice snapped him out of his musing. "Hannibal! You lied to me about what that party did to you. There's a big fresh stain on the back of your shirt. Where I came from, I saw enough of people being toasted that I know the signs."

"Don't make a fuss over a few welts. I've been worse smarted by jellyfish."

"But suppose they come back and toast you again? I won't have you tortured for my sake. I'll give myself up."

"You will not!" Hannibal said sharply. "Get that out of your head. If another party does come, and if you emit one peep about giving yourself up, by the beard of Saint Annabel I'll rope

your hands and feet and lug you into that cave a-kicking."

"I'll scream."

"Only the bats will hear," Hannibal retorted. He split open a red papaya and punctured a coconut. "Have something to eat. Sometime today I look for Arturo, my clever cousin and master of the census, to come over. He may pull ropes for you."

While they ate the papaya, Esther questioned him about his cousin, All Saints, the republic, Ferron. Hannibal was surprised at the depth and shrewdness of her questions.

As they talked, a brilliant big Morpho alighted on the papaya rind. Metallic lizards flashed across the moss. Forgetting his wounds and his fears about the future, Hannibal permitted his thoughts to dwell on what his relationship with this refugee girl might become, if somehow her troubles were smoothed out and the hunt was dropped. She found his company agreeable, for had she not asked him to remain there with her? With deeper acquaintance, might she not feel more than gratitude toward him? It was conceivable that his gardens and doves, his quiet isle, his obscure self, might in time erase all memory of the Old World, of the tumult and lordlings of her former life.

JUST after mid-day Arturo came, in his swank mahogany-and-chrome racing boat.

Hannibal waded into the shallows and carried him ashore so that he would not wet his elegant boots. He was not sure whether Arturo came because of loyalty to a blood-relative, or because it might be politically profitable to fish in troubled waters.

"About that woman," Arturo demanded. "Did you or didn't you?"

Hannibal slowly nodded. "I saw her in the tide, and I pulled her out."

"And now you want me to pull you out."

"No. It was her safety that I wanted your help to assure. She seems to be the center of much trouble."

"Trouble? You couldn't have bumped your clumsy head into a bigger wasp-nest if you'd tried, stupid."

"Arturo, tell me this: The republic needs men of science. On that liner are many such. Why don't we receive them, to our great profit?"

"Because it would set a precedent. We'd be overrun by alien hordes."

"But if our sister republics pitched in, nobody would be overrun."

"Keep to your beacons, Coo-coo. World affairs are not your garden. Where's the woman?"

"In the *bosque*, cousin, where I'm taking you. Do you think you can protect her?"

"*Pouf*, easily! But that's not the question. Expediency is the point, Coo-coo. In troubled times one has to look out for oneself. I'm looking out for Arturo Escreban. That old liner, off our south coast now, has provoked storm and counter-storm. Protecting the woman you salvaged might be a most Napoleonic move on my part. Or it might be a bombshell under my coat-tails."

On the threshold of the grotto, Arturo stopped in his tracks. His black eyes bulged. Esther had picked herself a nosegay of flowers and was sitting in a splash of the warm sun—a lovely occupant of a lovely nook.

"La-lee-lo!" Arturo purred. "What have we here? Is she ever a swell dish!"

With sinking heart Hannibal suspected that he had called in the lion to scare off the jackals. He laid a restraining hand on Arturo's lace cuff. "Cousin, she is a lone girl, and helpless. Please."

"Helpless—with that load of wow? That's all you know about women! Let's go."

Hannibal made the introduction. Arturo bowed twice and clicked his heels and kissed Esther's hand. He spoke to her in French, and she answered in that tongue.

Hannibal felt that this French business was just a way of shouldering him out; he did not speak the language. For Esther's sake he ignored the hint and tried to remain.

"Scram, Coo-coo," Arturo bade, in the patois of their canefield childhood. "Find yourself something to do at a distance. And keep an eye for launches of the Navigation. Busy yourself somehow, but anyhow—scram!"

BACK in his garden, the unhappy Hannibal set to work on his moves of precaution. He plucked a dozen papayas, two stems of lady-finger bananas, some coconuts and piñas, some sugar-cane to suck on, and an armful of his sweet pear-shaped grapefruit.

Keeping a weather eye on the straits, he lugged this food up to the cave and stored it down in the vault, against a time of need.

On his trips past the grotto he heard low voices, but no one called him into the conference. To be discarded like a fruit-rind, made him angry; he wished that Esther had asked him to remain. But she had not lifted a word against Arturo's dismissal of him. He hated to believe she was common clay, so soon forgetting how he'd drawn her back from death and been toasted for her sake.

Under the afternoon sun he dug a row of yams and toted them to the vault. He took water, a cooking-outfit, charcoal, fronds for a pallet, his spare lamp, a deck of cards, some books and scrivener things. Besieged hours were long hours. What lay ahead, for Esther and himself, he could not guess.

ALL afternoon his jealousy of Arturo and his worry about Esther mounted, till finally he could bear them no longer. Near sundown he crept to the edge of the clearing, crouched behind a rock, and raised his head for a look-see.

The grotto scene was not as he had feared—it was worse. Esther and Arturo sat together, petting. The beautiful one's head was snuggled complacently against Arturo's shoulder, and Arturo was dabbling in her hair. Her face was upturned, her lips convenient for kissing. If there was any remonstrance in her attitude, one failed to see it.

Hannibal's big fists clenched and unclenched; he itched to stride out there and twist Arturo's head off, and tell Esther to get gone from Bat Isle if she had to walk the waves. All his imaginative thoughts of that morning trooped past him, thumbing their noses and saying: "Dolt, stupid, donkey!"

He was ashamed that he had crept up and overseen. Not caring to lower himself further by eavesdropping, he backed away and went down and sat in his garden.

Gradually his anger passed, except anger at himself for not realizing how quickly Esther would discard him for a rising *politico* with lace cuffs. How little indeed he knew about women! For that matter, about men, and their various strifes. Wise the instinct, years ago, which had led him to get out of the city, where sharks in linen suits waxed fat, and the currents were so treacherous!

Just before dusk Arturo came down to the garden alone. Hannibal was sorry he was not taking Esther away. He wanted the islet to himself again. All that Esther would ever get him was more toasting and disillusion. He got the salted welts; Arturo got the kisses.

Silently he carried his cousin out to the shiny boat.

"Now listen, Coo-coo," Arturo said in parting. "I've figured out how to peel this banana. I'll have Esther smack over in All Saints dancing in the president's palace. But I can't do it snip-snap! In the meantime you keep her strictly out of sight. If they toast you some more, take it."

"You're very generous with my hide, cousin."

"Well, it's to save your neck—hers and mine too. There's more afoot than you know about, stupid."

"So I suspect. What leads you to think there's further toasting for me?"

"I would bet on it," Arturo said mysteriously. "So—brace yourself."

Back at his cabin, Hannibal fed his long-neglected doves. Then he cooked a substantial meal of rice, fish and new potatoes. At dusk, when the bats were piling out of the cave, he summoned Esther down from the *bosque*.

OVER the meal Esther remarked: "Your cousin is extraordinarily gifted, Hannibal."

"Arturo has ways, it seems."

"In the old country I met many individuals of public affairs; yet here, in this little republic, in a person born in a canebrake—I never met a man quicker to see and grasp his chance."

"He's a quick worker, Arturo—ah, yes." Hannibal blew on the maté in his saucer. "What plan does my cousin have about you?"

"He's going to work up documents showing that I was a survivor of the earthquake ten years ago. That my family was destroyed, and that I have lived nameless these years. So I shall become a native-born of the republic."

"Ridiculous! All the world yonder will know who you are."

"In fact, yes. Officially, no. I tell you, there's alchemy in documents these days, Hannibal. Those papers will alter me from untouchable dross to a fellow-racial of the iron man. Yes, these are times of paper sophistries, and 'the truth abideth not.'"

"I'll take the truth," Hannibal grunted. "A mere infant of a hurricane can disperse papers to nothingness; but the truth is a solid rock."

They walked out into the dusk. The doves had flown to their roosts in the

ceibas. The last wisp of bats had vanished across the straits. The ocean lay quiet, unutterably beautiful as its blue darkened.

In a tongue strange to Hannibal, Esther quoted:

> Swiftly walk over the western wave,
> Spirit of Night—

"Oh, Hannibal, how lovely this Caribbean of yours! How like the Mediterranean at the best. It's only awaiting the rhapsody of a Shelley."

"You refer to some gentleman you've danced with, perhaps?"

"No, no! He was a poet, a man able to word the simple great truths which—well, your fumbling speeches show you have them within yourself, Hannibal."

"Thank you so much," Hannibal replied sarcastically. He was remembering her arm around Arturo's neck, and he swore she would not get next to *him* with flattery or witchery. She was a clinging liana, all right, but of the deadly sort that strangled the tree, like the jagüey vine.

He asked: "What's this political kettle of fish that Arturo seems to be cooking up, in All Saints?"

"It's tremendous. A brilliant stroke."

"He's always brilliant. But what, specifically, is his intention?"

Esther explained: "Arturo is master of the census, is he not? As such, he holds a strategic political position. Only those vote whom he enters on his lists. In the coming election he's going to see that only the right people are entered. In brief, he plans to dynamite Ferron out of the presidency."

HANNIBAL blessed himself. "Astounding! What intrigue! But it won't come off. Poor misguided cousin! Stop him from this adventure, Esther. He'll only get himself pulverized by his dynamite. The iron man"—Hannibal unconsciously saluted—"is strong and crafty."

"He is not!" Esther countered hotly. "He is weak and greedy. He's a second-rate gangster using secondhand ideas. The republic groans under his taxes and graft. You have no government. As in my *patria*, you have only a mob of hooligans who are not fit to black the boots or light the morning fires of the people they oppress!"

"Ah, true. My countrymen, as I once told you, have honor and kindliness in their hearts. Ferron has greed and cruelty. But—he rules."

"Well, he won't rule long! Where no opposition is allowed, where hatreds are aroused and dammed up and have no outlet, what happens? Comes eventually the explosion, like a plugged volcano! No dictator lasts. In these swift times he lasts even shorter. Your Ferron has already overstayed. A puff would blow him out of power. He himself knows this, and quakes. Against a political upheaval, he has stored three million dollars in Miami and New York. 'Jump-money,' Arturo calls it."

SO that, Hannibal reflected, was the subject of the long conference in the grotto. Odd conference indeed—spinning political intrigue like a spider-web, while they billed and cooed like doves in March!

Esther said: "Arturo and I are counting on you to help in this *coup*, Hannibal. Your rôle is crucial."

Hannibal jumped. "On *me?* I'll have nothing to do with your schemes! I want only to live in peace, alone here."

"You must help."

"I won't. Not for a Moor's heaven. Affairs of politics are not for dolts like me."

"You're not a dolt. You have the stubborn ideals of a great good person. Arturo lacks these, despite his brilliance. You're a better man, if you'd only believe so. What is that saying about the wolf which lets the rabbits kick dust into his eyes? You could be a wolf—"

"Who wants to be a wolf? Woman, I say no. I'll have no part in this intrigue. It'll only get people killed, and I'm against that. I say further, this: the sooner Arturo takes you away from here, to dance with him in the palace, the happier I shall be."

Esther stopped short and faced him, her brown eyes wide. "What's that? Dancing with Arturo? I would for expedience' sake, not otherwise. He has weaknesses. Pretty women are one of them. I admire his cleverness; I'm grateful to him; but he means nothing to me personally. In fact, I dislike his company."

That shameless lie was the last bitter dregs of disillusion to Hannibal. So she disliked Arturo's company, she who had spent hours in the grotto with him, her lips as free as a flower to a bumblebee! He thought: "What a bundle of lies and witchery I salvaged from the sea! What a mare's-nest of trouble for myself! Between Arturo's plotting and

Hannibal's big fists clenched, and he itched to twist Arturo's head off.

this woman's web, I had best go to the ocean and jump in."

"Hannibal, what makes you think that blood would be shed in this *coup?*"

"Well, it's usually that way. The Outs shoot the Ins out, and move in."

"But this is a legal election."

"By your own words it's a census-roll intrigue!"

Esther tried another way of persuading him: "Hannibal, can you live here with your doves and peaceful garden, and not care about your people yonder? In these days a person must stick with his people and forget himself. There is no personal salvation."

"Did you stick with your people, in your *patria*—or even on the old liner?"

Esther had no answer to that, and the thrust apparently hurt her.

In silence they walked back up to the cabin. There Hannibal bade her goodnight and hurried off to his beacons.

He was deeply troubled as he rowed out across the black rocks. What if Esther was right in saying he had a wolf's prowess? What if he indeed was a stronger man than Arturo; than Ferron, even? If this was true, then for the sake of his *patria* he must give up his peaceful garden, his quiet isle, his obscurity. At whatever danger to his life, or whatever anguish of heart, he must go out and do battle for his kindly, oppressed countrymen, even though it led to his personal Calvary.

In spite of being dog-tired, Hannibal had to stay awake for the second straight night, and keep alert for boats or lights.

He refused Esther's offer to take over the vigil; she had no experience at such things. So in the dark cabin she slept, while he sat in the doorway and watched for another toasting-party.

It came with the dawn—three launches of the Navigation. Hannibal barely managed to get Esther up to the cave-mouth unseen.

For some reason Esther did not even suggest giving herself up, as she had vowed to do. She cried a little; she kissed him, saying: "Hannibal, it's got to be." But then she went down to her safety beneath the earth and let him go down to his toasting.

A colonel and forty men landed. A small detail set to work on Hannibal, but most of the party spread out over the islet to hunt for the refugee girl.

With savage vandalism the searchers wrecked Hannibal's isle. They uprooted his garden like hogs. They burned his cabin. They put the machete to his trees and arbors. They dynamited the rain-water apron and reservoir which had cost him six months of work. An officer with a shotgun went around bang-whanging at his doves till the last few survivors fled in panic to the mainland.

The party left him nothing but his boat, and that was the property of the Navigation.

This vandalism and savagery showed Hannibal how furiously the political pot was boiling, and how hotly tempers had flamed up. Finding and deporting the refugee girl had become a test of strength with Ferron. By his own choice, he had made Esther a symbol of his power over the republic.

TO Hannibal, it seemed a crazy blunder to flout national sentiment on an issue so trifling. Instead of trying to cram his will down the throat of the populace, an intelligent leader would have done exactly the opposite—would have thrown all the protection and power of the republic around the refugee girl; would have evoked for himself a tremendous outburst of popularity by obeying the national clamor; would have listened to the kindly and humane heart of his people.

The whole matter thoroughly disillusioned Hannibal about Ferron. The man wasn't shrewd, but willful; not strong, but petty.

The morning hours passed—an endless time for the pain-dazed but stubborn Hannibal. Midday came; the toasting-party let up on their victim long enough to eat lunch. During this interval Corporal Innes, squatting on the sand beside Hannibal, whispered to him:

"Here—swallow this." He gave Hannibal a potion of bitter drug. "It will help you through what is to come."

Hannibal muttered: "A million—of my—worthless thanks."

"Poor friend, listen: You have a snake for a cousin. Your Arturo told the officials positively that you have the girl here. They were in doubt, till he himself told them."

HANNIBAL found this perfidy hard to believe. For all his faults, Arturo had always been loyal to his blood—till now.

He wondered why Arturo had informed on him. Of a certainty it somehow furthered Arturo's schemes. Truly, Arturo was generous with a cousin's bare hide and a cousin's anguish.

"If it helps you any to know," Innes further whispered, "all the world yonder is cheering for you in your dolor. That refugee liner aroused an explosion of sympathy through the republic. Then when the rumor arose that you, Hannibal Escreban of the Navigation, had saved one of the foreign girls from the sharks and are shielding her—ah, the story spread like a fire in dry cane. In All Saints they are gambling wildly, *pesos* to *centavos*, that you will not give the girl up. You are a hero."

"Before God," Hannibal mumbled, through puffed lips, "I want to be no hero. I am merely being thrust into the fire by my cousin to pull his chestnuts out."

"That is true. He's scheming to sweep himself into power behind your heroism. Why don't you scotch him? Surrender the girl."

Hannibal lifted pain-bleared eyes.

"No!"

"Why not? Do you feel a tenderness toward her?"

"I do not! She is a schemer like Arturo. To further her wishes, she would give herself to a man as freely as the nameless ones of the Plaza alleys."

"Then why shield her?"

"Because she is a woman. And because she is hunted. To protect her, because she is a woman and helpless, is a point of honor. If I gave her up, God would forever turn His eyes from me."

"Bravo! A thousand salutes to you! Stick to your silence!"

Hannibal muttered grimly: "A toasting like this does potent things to a man. Hourly I grow more like a wolf."

"I grow dizzy, merely seeing it. But silence. Here comes the guard back."

It wasn't so bad, what they did to Hannibal that afternoon—or at least, he felt nothing very keenly. The pain-dulling drug which Innes had slipped him was an infinite help. Why they did not kill him and have done with it, he did not clearly know—unless they were afraid that his death would set the whole republic afire.

After the party finally gave up, that evening, and returned to their boats, Hannibal crept into the surf and washed himself, despite the salt-water sting. He flexed and kneaded his legs till they obeyed him and he could walk.

While the dark came on, he shuffled along the landwash like a drunken sailor, shaking off his daze.

Across the straits the lights of All Saints blazed out. Hannibal noticed that some unknown person in a motorboat was attending to the beacons. He cursed his plight and his scheming cousin. Job gone, his isle wrecked, all his personal belongings destroyed, his very body mauled and battered—how clever indeed of Arturo!

Regretting that the party had not left him even a shirt for his back, he stumbled up to the cave, groped down the black passageway, and tottered feebly into the vault.

Esther came toward him with a flashlight. As she looked at Hannibal, her face paled. But that was all. No tears or hand-wringing. She acted as though she had seen, in her own *patria,* many a sight like him; many a person in his shape, and worse.

She took his arm and steadied him. "The pallet is over here, ready," she said. "I'll prepare you some food and nurse you. You have done your part. Now you can only wait upon events, and pray that other people will show the brave honor you have shown."

IT was always night in the cave, so Hannibal did not know whether it was day or night, five hours or fifty later, when Arturo appeared. With Arturo came two army officers, a doctor, a camera-man and three impressive civilians. All carried pocket-guns, and the faces of the party were hard.

Arturo, leader and strategist, was in a fighting and pitiless mood. He talked like a machine-gun running bursts. He trod like a steel-spurred champion in a cockpit, who would kill or be killed.

He thrust an envelope at Esther. "Your papers. You're now Isabel Juana—something or other. Read and find out who you are. You're a citizen. But you'll have to stay in hiding awhile yet. Perhaps you'll dance in the palace. Perhaps you'll get shot with the rest of us."

ARTURO turned to Hannibal. "Cousin, bestir yourself. We want pictures of you. In your shape, you're propaganda. Doctor, can't you paint those furrows on him red so they'll show up better?"

The camera-man said: "He doesn't need touching up. He's hot plates, just as he is. Have the goodness, a couple of you gentlemen, to lift him up. The photos will have more kick if he seems too mauled to stand of himself."

The bewildered Hannibal was flash-photographed from half a dozen angles. Then he was laid back on the blanket. The doctor, a colonel in the army, gave him a thorough going-over.

"You are almost offensively healthy, señor," the doctor said. Hannibal was astonished at being called "señor" by so high an officer. Only yesterday he had been barked at and kicked around by corporals. Now a colonel was addressing him respectfully. "No broken bones, no fever or infections, no impairments save superficial ones. I'll leave ointments with your nurse, and something to aid sleep."

Arturo snapped: "Let's get out of here and back to All Saints. If affairs keep on breaking wrong for us, we'll need something more than ointments for our hides, and we'll sleep soundly indeed with no aid at all!"

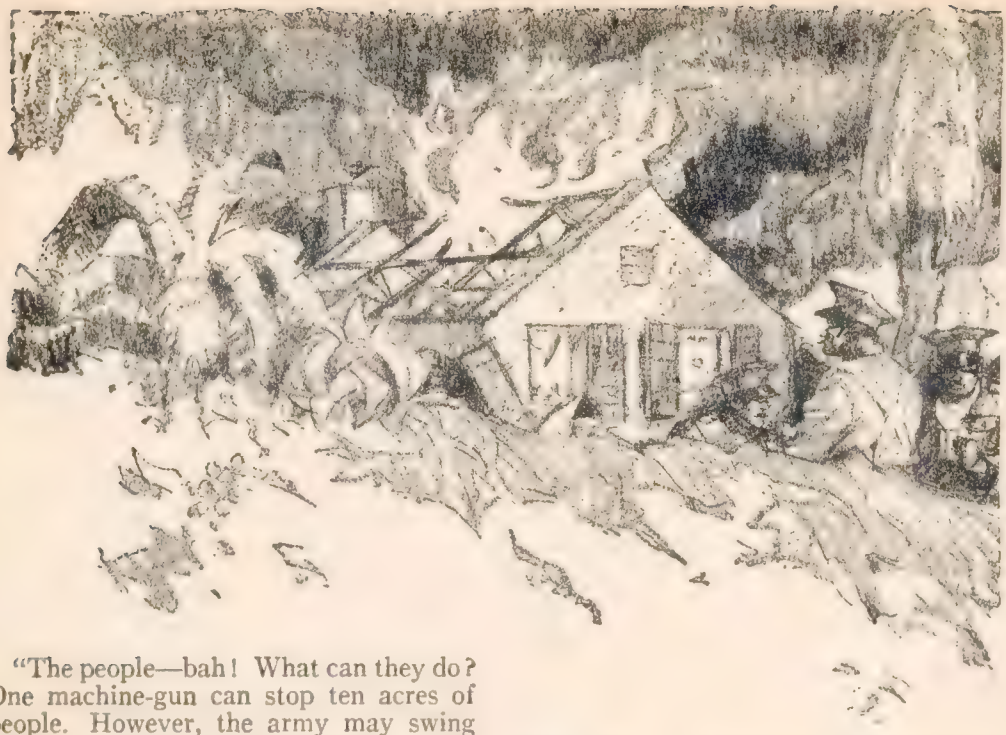
He waved the men out with his flashlight, but turned briefly to Esther.

"The election's off! Postponed indefinitely. A thousand damns! There goes our brilliant plan—blown to perdition."

"What happened to the election?"

"Ferron smelled a rat. Investigated the census-rolls. Saw they were doctored. Knew he'd get snowed under by the balloting. So he proclaimed an emergency. Clamped on martial law. Arrested scores of us and pitched us into the *morro* dungeon. So far, however, his bodyguard squads have not caught up with these men and myself."

"But the people are all against him. He can't hold power long."



"The people—bah! What can they do? One machine-gun can stop ten acres of people. However, the army may swing to us. They're snarling at Ferron. As I told you, Ferron has been stealing the soldier-retirement-funds. Part of his jump-money! Maybe I didn't pump that juicy secret into the barracks! The fool, to steal from the regiments and then expect the regiments to fight for him! If they revolt, they'll shoot hell out of him and his henchmen all over the republic."

"Arturo!" Esther went white of face. "You'd said there'd be no bloodshed. A régime that comes in by bayonets goes out by bayonets. Rather than have butchery, cancel all plans—"

"Too late for that. It's his hide, or ours. He may get panicky and flee. He's got three chartered Yanqui planes moored in the harbor. For him and his camp-followers! *I* don't want shootings. They leave hatreds. The bloodless revolt is always better. If Ferron decides to jump, I'll escort him personally to the plane, with the utmost courtesy. . . . I must go. *Adios.*"

ESTHER came back to the pallet. Thoughtful, sad, she examined the medical supplies the doctor had left.

Hannibal demanded: "What's all this spider-mesh of intrigue and trouble? During your talk in the grotto, what was the plan you and Arturo hatched?"

Esther poured a dose of medicine into a glass and diluted it with wine. "Why even talk about a plan that's dead?"

"It seems to have concerned me: As part of it, I got toasted. There'll be other such plans. I have the right to know what I am facing."

"There'll be no more plans in which *I* have a hand," Esther said despondently. Since her long cry in the cabin, Hannibal had not seen her in so black a gloom. "Intrigue of any sort is wrong. I should have known. Here, please—take this. Then I'll dress your wounds, and you can sleep."

Her sadness alarmed Hannibal. She seemed defeated and hopeless. Her brief zest had vanished. At heart she seemed moving back toward the despair from which he once had salvaged her.

He tried to cheer her up. "What matter if you made one mistake, Esther? We all make hundreds. Don't be so sad. You are now a citizen of the republic. I have faith that Ferron will go. Then you'll be safe, and famous among us. You can begin a new life."

Esther held the glass to his lips. "Swallow this. You wanted to know about our plan. I'll tell you what it was: In brief, we were going to make you the elected president of the Republic."

Hannibal choked on the last of the medicine.

"President of the Republic—*me?*"

"Exactly that. Arturo wanted to become president himself, but I persuaded him otherwise. It took long arguments and—and persuasion of a personal nature. Arturo has a weakness about women.

"Our scheme was to place your name on the ballot as Ferron's opponent. Having

"In All Saints they are gambling," Innes whispered, "that you will not give the girl up."

so obscure a rival would have seemed a jest to Ferron. A sleeping-potion, to lull suspicion. He would have laughed—and lost. For Arturo, as master of the census, was to see that the right people voted. It was a brilliant *coup*. Only, it was dishonest. And it has gone up in smoke. There is to be no election. Instead, there is martial law, and the prospect of killings."

Like searchlights stabbing the night, Esther's explanation solved two great mysteries for Hannibal: Arturo's betrayal of him to the authorities, and that consequent toasting, had been a deliberate part of this plan. It was to increase his stature in the eyes of the republic. Truly, a balloting would have snowed the iron man under. Truly, the intrigue had been a brilliant thrust.

He understood, too, why Esther had been so free with her kisses that afternoon with Arturo in the *bosque*. It had taken all her persuasive weapons to keep Arturo from grasping the presidency for himself. In a way, that afternoon had been *her* toasting!

IN remorse, Hannibal reached for her hand. "Esther, I have harbored bad thoughts about you—about you and Arturo—about your honor as a girl. They were false thoughts. I should have seen the truth. Can you perhaps, in time, forgive me?"

"Of course," Esther said. But there was no heart in her tones. "That also belongs with the dead."

"What's dead? Don't we still have our fight to oust Ferron? And then the long labor to restore the republic to cleanliness?"

"You don't want to fight." Esther took her hand away from him, and busied herself with the ointments and dressings.

"You want to live obscurely, with your doves and garden."

"But perhaps I've changed," Hannibal argued. The sleeping-medicine was taking hold; his words came thickly, like cold molasses. "I'm beginning to agree with your opinion that I have wolf-blood in me."

"That opinion is withdrawn, Hannibal. Rest in obscurity."

"Oh, woman! Oh, changeable! You bade me be a wolf; and now you did exactly the contrary."

"Forget it all, Hannibal. It is past."

Her sadness puzzled Hannibal. Something in her manner frightened him. He wanted to sit up, to find out what she intended doing, that made her so sad. But the sleeping-potion was getting in its work, quickly, powerfully. His body was numbed; his senses were going dim like lights turning out.

Esther smoothed his pillow and covered him with a blanket, against the dank chill of the vault. "The course of your life hereafter," she said, "is between you and your God. Likewise the course of my life must be of my own choosing. Now, please lie still. You must sleep." Her voice came from a distance, and she was a vague blur before his eyes. "Sleep, Hannibal—and for your kindness to the refugee girl—my thanks."

WHEN Hannibal stirred back to consciousness, he was aware of the lamp turned low, and then of a loneliness in the dank vault.

"Esther," he said. Then sharply: "Esther!"

There was no answer.

He sat up and looked around, jolted by the silence. She was not there.

Yet she had not been gone long. Before leaving, she had prepared a meal for him and put it near the pallet. Some of the food was still warmish.

For a moment Hannibal thought that she had gone up to the cave mouth for a breath of air and the reassurance of the sunshine. But the silence echoed like a slammed door. He remembered her odd manner, her last words; and fear shook him.

He got to his feet, unsteadily, and turned up the lamp, praying to see Esther lying asleep back in the shadows of the old sea-trunks. On the floor he saw a paper, with the hilt of a broken sword on it to draw his attention.

Hannibal picked the paper up. It was the certificate declaring Esther a native-born of the republic. She had torn the page nearly in two, as though to renounce the falsehoods which made her a citizen. On the back of the torn paper Hannibal found a note, written in pencil:

Hannibal, my Cherished:

On the liner it was wrong of me to seek the cheap exit of death. My act brought no solution to the troubles of my people, the host aboard. It only brought dissension to your republic. And my intriguing may bring the ultimate disaster of blood and carnage. To the extent I can, I must atone. Therefore I am going.

The refugee ship has been refused haven, with finality, and is sailing for the Old Land. Through the straits the liner is returning, and I am returning to the liner. You were right; I should have remained with that unhappy host of my people. I am rejoining them, to share their lot and to work, in what way I can, for their ultimate salvation.

Esther

The paper dropped from Hannibal's hands. He glanced around for a flashlight but saw none, and grabbed up the lamp. Shielding the chimney to keep the flame from being sucked out, he hurried out of the vault, along the passageway where the bat-clusters protested sleepily, and scrambled up the steep slant to the cave-mouth and the light of day.

It was mid-afternoon, warm and lovely; but Hannibal could see nothing more because of the jungle greenery. He threw the lamp away; it shattered against a rock; and he stumbled down the path to the open.

He gave a quick sweeping glance along the sands of the island, but did not glimpse Esther. His cockle was gone. He looked out upon the straits. The tide was at low slack; there was little current.

A league to the north, the Baltic liner was passing out of the straits and heading toward the open Atlantic. The rails of the afterdeck were crowded with silent people gazing at the retreating shores of the republic.

HANNIBAL knew that Esther had taken his cockle and rowed out into the path of the liner.

Surely though, he thought, so huge a ship would not pause for so tiny a splinter. But it had. In the middle of the straits he saw his little boat, drifting. It was empty. Esther had hailed the liner and been taken aboard.

In a daze of remorse Hannibal stood among the ruins of his garden and watched the big old ship till it was half hull down in the blue wastes. His remark to Esther about staying with her people came back to torment him. The unmeant cruelty of that remark was part of what had driven her away.

ONE of his doves flew down from a ceiba; it had returned from the mainland, but after the slaughtering by the colonel's party, it was wary; it circled around Hannibal uncertainly. He noticed it at last, held out his hand, and the bird alighted.

"Our beautiful one is gone, *paloma*," he said, grief-stricken. "Ah, gone! I loved her. To my death, I shall remember her sweet face on the pillow of the cot. But even as you came back, it may be that some day she will return. She cannot now. There is anguish in the world. But when that is over, she may come. We will comb the earth with messages to find her."

The dove cooed, as if in reply.

As he stood there, a distant *ratt-tatt-tatt-tt-tt* rolled across the straits from the direction of All Saints. Another staccato thrumming opened up, and then a third. The noises merged into an indistinguishable low roar.

Hannibal took his gaze from the old liner and turned to look. He thought that the throaty roar was machine-guns, opening the civil-war; and he was jarred by fright, not for himself but for his fellowmen. For he once had seen the streets of the capital city liberally sprinkled with the dead, in a futile insurrection; and the deadly chatter of the guns had rung in his ears for months.

But the roar was not guns. In the blue harbor of All Saints a silvery speck was moving across the water. It gathered speed. A thousand yards off the *morro*, it swung into the air. Two more specks followed it.

Climbing for altitude, the three planes came circling out above the straits, thundered over Bat Isle, and lined away northwest, on the Havana-Miami run.

"Ah, *paloma*," Hannibal said, watching the swiftly disappearing planes, "there vanishes the iron man—and three million dollars! But he is cheap at the price, the coward! At the first puff of trouble, he goes. No toasting for *him!* He lacks the stomach, even, for a fair fight. But let us say thanks that he went in peace. Esther will hear of it, somewhere in the world. She will be glad that no blood was shed on account of her."

He realized that Arturo's faction had won. That was what the airplanes clearly said. Rafael Ferron's cruelties and greed had caught up with him; the republic had thrown him out. He would live in an alien land, despised, afraid of shadows, fearful of retribution. He would die an outcast, full of shame.

Because Hannibal had seen gala uproars in All Saints, he saw, or imagined he saw, a great celebration breaking out in the capital city: the feathery trails of fireworks arching upward, the hot-blooded parades, the blast of whistles aship and ashore, and salvos from the *morro* guns.

As he watched, he saw for a certainty that there was unusual activity in the harbor. The republic's inconsequential navy—a cruiser and two destroyers—had weighed anchor and were maneuvering slowly toward the harbor entrance. Behind the war-craft gathered a dozen launches of the Navigation, and private vessels, and on down to little run-abouts dancing around like lucky-bugs—at least a hundred ships in all.

After a while the armada got marshaled, after a fashion. Furious signaling by the war-craft slowed down the fast ones, poked up the slow ones, jockeyed them all into position; and finally, in a parade front a mile long, the armada wheeled out of the harbor and headed across the straits, all their whistles tied down, pennants flying, and those with guns blazing and bellowing.

The armada was halfway across the straits before Hannibal woke up to its mission. In his desolation about Esther, he had forgotten that for the better half of a week he had been the battle-flag of the successful faction. *Pesos* to *centavos* had been wagered on him throughout the republic. High officers had señored him. He had been groomed for honors.

The procession was coming to take him across in triumph!

THE realization jolted Hannibal like an electric shock. He wanted none of the whistling or gun-banging; or the torch parades and balls that night. Worse still, Arturo would use him thereafter, cashing in, calling an election, booting him into the presidency. A figurehead, a shirt with nothing in it, a puppet dangled by the clever Arturo, and living always in the hot glare of prominence—all that was coming across the straits to bag him and drag him away from his quiet isle. . . . He

turned to flee. He wanted to escape to the nethermost dark of the cave.

But then Hannibal looked again at the distant plume of smoke that was alone visible of the liner carrying Esther. Memories of the toasting came back, and his fists clenched; he had stood the toasting; he could stand a fanfare in his honor. Memories of Esther's faith in him came back. Words she had spoken jigged through his tumultuous thoughts: *"For your people and your republic. . . . A better man than Arturo, if you only believe so."*

A grim smile grew on Hannibal's battered face. Tremendous the astonishment of Arturo, in the days to come, when the figurehead came to life! Tremendous the dismay of Arturo and all other intriguers when the puppet cast off their strings, and demanded that the republic be served!

He stood wide-legged, wavering—a battleground between the lure of obscurity and the call to arms. But he knew what Esther would have him do, were she standing beside him. And that was what he finally did. He turned and walked down toward the wave-edge to meet the advancing armada. He walked slowly, to keep in step with one who was not there. . . .

There was to have been an interview with President Hannibal Escreban, but something turned up and he couldn't see me. Perhaps it's as well; a story gathered from a dozen viewpoints has more dimension than a one-source account.

Besides, President Escreban lacks the gift of gab.

The opening of the war hit his little land a stiff blow. But his honest and democratic administration has already brought prosperity back. The republic is busy, thriving, buoyant. Roads get built; new schools go up; malaria goes down; and *chivo* or graft is being rooted out mercilessly.

As to why this present administration is incomparably the best that the little republic ever had, I would say that President Hannibal Escreban is a man who genuinely loves his land and people without hating other lands and peoples. In fact, he wants his country to be prosperous, so that it can offer a safe haven and a new life to its share of refugees from Europe's inhumanity.

More specifically, he is praying that a particular one of those refugees is still alive, in that maelstrom of war, and will come when his messages find her.

Another story by William Byron Mowery will appear in an early issue.

OUR READERS

THIS is a democracy: every man and woman has a voice in the government. So too we think every reader should have a voice in deciding the sort of material he wants in his magazine. We are therefore always glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestion; and for the half-dozen or so we publish each month we will pay the writer ten dollars each. Letters should not run over two hundred words, and should be addressed to Editor of Letters, Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Avenue, New York.

The response to our invitation has already been so generous that we find it impossible to print as many as we should like to—or to give each one the personal acknowledgment it deserves.

However, we think you will be interested in those appearing below; and we take this opportunity of thanking the many other readers who have written their kindly—often too kindly—words of encouragement.

Dear Sir:

On the day that the Germans marched into Poland, new responsibilities were born to BLUE BOOK*—and I might add that so far it is more than measuring up to these responsibilities.*

For certainly we should have war stories and then more war stories—stories that not only prove as interesting as better than average adventure stories, but which will serve more useful purposes as well: namely, the awakening of the American people to the danger—present and future—they face and the kindling of the national spirit to enable us to cope with this danger.

Such stories as "I was an Altmark Prisoner" will not only accomplish this purpose, but to me are more intensely interesting than fiction. There must be literally hundreds of such absorbing adventures waiting to be told today. So let's have more of them.

Short stories or long stories, true adventures or novelettes, stories by big-name writers or by unknowns—what difference does it make, so long as you grasp the opportunity to help rekindle the spirit of '76—and to help match the morale of '17!

Having followed BLUE BOOK *for a long time, I'm sure that you won't fail.*

James R. Boyd
Birmingham, Ala.

Dear Sir:

You have asked for constructive criticism on the contents of your magazine from your readers, and their preference of stories and authors. That is a commendable and timely thought. As a reader of BLUE BOOK *for years, I shall do my bit.*

Regarding the types of stories printed in recent months, I regret to say that I find cer-

WRITE TO US

tain things very much overdone. Simply too much war and murder.

I feel that two shorter novels would be a happier choice than one book-length novel. You have had a good nature story here and there—let us have more of that, as well as more comical and travel stories, and less of crime and war (sickening to so many of us) and serial matter.

And I shall wind up by saying that, aside from certain more recent imperfections, you still publish one of the best, if not the best, and interesting magazines of this type.

Ernest Netzbandt
Bismarck, N. Dak.

Dear Sir:

I teach in a certain Southern university. My time is fairly well consumed with academic pursuits and the effort to keep up with my field. I have little time for leisure reading. Consequently, I like my fiction packed full of action, the more plot the better. When I do sit down to read for the purpose of pleasure rather than profession I like a good, fast moving story that takes you along with it.

Usually, I find such stories in BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE. *That is why I buy it. Inside its format I can fly, sail, or hitch-hike to the ends of the world without leaving my study.*

Since action is what I want in my readings, I would like to suggest this concerning editorial policy; don't concern yourself with where and when the story is laid. I would rather read a thriller about Adam and Eve, if it were a good story, than labor through a half-hearted opus which is published because it is modern or timely (whatever that means). As to the length of the stories, the shorter the better. This gives a greater variety of experiences, and can be more easily read in spare moments. Run long stories as serials. A good serial, such as the current one by Dornford Yates, keeps a reader watching the newsstands daily for your blue and silver cover.

P. S. If you publish this, for the sake of classroom discipline, I wish you would do me the favor of withholding my name. Thank you.

Dear Sir:

For twenty years we have been reading the BLUE BOOK. *My son is the third generation to enjoy your clean, thrill-packed stories. Its suitability for the in-between-age reader is one of the really fine things about it.*

This feature has led me to place BLUE BOOK *in our village library. As librarian, I can assure you of its popularity. Some of the copies become absolutely tattered. The Leland Jamieson aviation stories seem to top the list of favorites. However,* Tiny David, Red Wolf of Arabia *and* Northwest Jane *are much-loved characters. H. Bedford-Jones is read and reread, I find. With Dornford Yates added to your author list the women will undoubtedly read* BLUE BOOK *more. Mystery novelettes are popular.*

Two more appreciated features are (1) the minimum of advertising; (2) complete stories on consecutive pages.

*For adventure, travel, dangerous living; for honest laughter; for the smell of the wind and sea; for genuine, clean entertainment,—I give you, gentlemen—*McCall's BLUE BOOK! *Unchanged—please!*

Alda V. Carrow
Port Sanilac, Mich.

Dear Sir:

Your final inquiry as to our favorite authors and illustrators is a tip-off; you are fishing for pats on the back. If you can pull yourselves out of that attitude here are some suggestions:

Most novelettes are 5,000-word short stories padded 200 percent.

A top-notch novel serialized like that of Dornford Yates is a good come-on to keep sales up, but a reputation for novels like that of Dornford Yates is a better one.

Time or locale has nothing to do with the merit of a story. The garden of Eden and feudal Europe are perfectly acceptable as backgrounds if the authors know their garden of Eden or their feudal Europe. In other words, an authentic background with human characters makes a good story.

That's the word: Human. *Third-graders may like newspaper-strip supermen, but adults, even escapists, want plausible heroes. We readers won't mind if the hero makes an occasional pass at a pretty girl. We're likely to decide he's a stuffed shirt if he doesn't.*

War stories are good now because of their timeliness, but it is the timeliness we like, not the war. Next year something else will be timely.

R. J. Wheatley,
Santa Cruz, Calif.

Dear Sir:

Men are always complaining about women usurping their prerogatives. Well, I am guilty on one count: I do not take their seat in a barber-shop; I have long straight hair; I do not grab their tobacco and "likker," as I do not smoke or drink. I do, however, nab the magazine that my husband loftily told me "wouldn't interest you, as these are he-man stories."

The idea: In this August issue that he brought home, I have, to console me while enjoying grippe, several writers that I feel are old friends, i.e., *Peter B. Kyne, H. Bedford-Jones and Dornford Yates. And what action there is in "The Silver Bell!" I liked "Cowboy" Carson's story too, poor kid! Take it all in all, the men can have barber-shops, cigarettes and cocktails, but when it comes to the* BLUE BOOK *I demand equal rights for women!*

Mrs. B. Bates,
Baltimore, Maryland

A spirited story of Tiny David and the State police.

"Tie him up, Jim," Tiny David ordered. "I'll keep him covered."

"LOOKING at you two birds," declared Captain Charles Field, commanding officer of the Black Horse Troop, New York State Police, "makes me feel that the process of evolution has been very slow, and that there have been lots of throwbacks."

Lieutenant James Crosby sighed wearily. The Skipper was using a roundabout approach to the subject at hand. Past experience had proved that disaster, when delayed, would be more complete upon arrival.

Lieutenant Edward David, recognizing all the signs of a long session, allowed his thoughts to stray to a visit he was due to pay his dentist the following Monday. By comparison, the subject was a pleasant one.

"We get three tips, all of them good," Captain Field continued. "The Montreal police find the Greek freighter that brought the stuff over, and grab the cook's helper who took it ashore; but the dope has already been landed. Then they learn that the stuff is cocaine, intended for the United States."

Captain Field paused in the manner of a man who has just been served a good steak, and who wishes to savor it fully before eating. The fact that his listeners were aware of all that he was relating merely added to his enjoyment.

"An informant tells us that the junk was brought across night before last. He even tips us off that the trip will be made through the North Point section."

The Captain glanced about, as if inviting contradictions. None came. Mr. David listened mentally to the buzz of a dentist's drill. He found the sound very comforting.

The Milky Way

By ROBERT S. MILL

Illustrated by Charles Chickering

"The third tip," Captain Field continued, "comes from the Syrchester police. They tell us that narcotic addicts there have been undergoing a shortage, or famine, as they call it, because several large sources of supply have been shut off; but that word has been passed about that a big shipment from Montreal is coming through northern New York."

The commanding officer's voice gained in volume as the recital progressed. His enjoyment increased, and was tempered only by the feeble showing of the opposition.

"Did either of you say anything?" he baited them.

Mr. David left the imagined dentist, who was prodding a live nerve, and returned reluctantly to the present.

"It was just one of those things, sir," was his profound observation.

Captain Field brightened. Here was something he could get his teeth into.

"One of those things! The Federal men block the border. I turn you two mistakes loose with a detail of thirty men, and you put a patrol on every road at a point five miles south of the line Check and double-check, as they say on a radio program that is about five years ahead of your mental ages. Then what happens?"

MR. CROSBY, making no use of wisdom bitterly acquired, attempted a weak defense:

"We checked everything that came through. Three cars didn't look so good to us, so we brought them in for a thorough going-over." His sigh was profound. "I think we may have missed them, sir," he concluded lamely.

Captain Field slipped into high gear:

"Don't think—you haven't the proper equipment, and it's bad for you. Besides, I'll save you the trouble. There's no 'may' about your gumming things up. The Syrchester police telephoned just before you two spoiled my day by showing your faces: The dope-famine is ended."

Captain Field leaned back in his chair. This was the high moment.

"We got rid of the horses, so we can't use you in the stables. You don't have intelligence enough to work on cars. It would be bad for discipline to put you on the business end of a lawn-mower. That leaves us—"

A telephone-bell postponed their fate.

"Yes?" The Captain's voice showed his annoyance at the interruption. "All right. Tell Judge Varey I'll be right down." He picked up his barracks cap. "You two birds can stay on the fire until I get back. It won't hurt you, because you are both half-baked."

Mr. David shifted his vast form.

"We haven't seen a bed for forty-eight hours. Is it all right if we get some sleep, sir?"

Captain Field appeared to give the matter deep thought.

"I can't think of a single reason why either of you should ever be awake," he declared as he departed.

Mr. Crosby listened with pleasure to the sound of an outgoing automobile.

"Judge Varey," he asserted, "is a gentleman. He is a scholar. He is an eminent jurist. He is—"

"Very useful," Tiny David added.

THE gentleman whom they extolled was, meanwhile, having his troubles. A murder-trial was getting under way. All morning, members of a jury panel had answered to their names, and then, almost without exception, had proceeded to disqualify themselves for jury duty. The majority of the few exceptions had proved unsatisfactory to either defense or prosecution. Judge Varey glanced at a jury-box in which only three men were seated, and motioned to an attendant.

"Call Captain Field, and tell him I wish he would come down here at once," he directed.

That done, Judge Varey settled back in comfort. The presence of Captain Field should have a restraining effect upon reluctant talesmen. The Judge gave his attention to a butcher, who said he had deep-rooted scruples against capital punishment.

The District Attorney looked at the Judge.

"Is it a matter of conscience?" asked Judge Varey.

"That's it, Judge," said the butcher. "Conscientious scruples."

"Excused," said Judge Varey wearily.

"Delmo Vaskon! Delmo Vaskon to the stand!"

There was a pause. Then a man, obviously a farmer, slouched forward.

"Do you solemnly swear that the answers you are about to give—"

The clerk's voice trailed off into a singsong mumble.

"Yup," came the reply.

The clerk pointed to the witness-chair.

Mr. Vaskon seated himself. The District Attorney stepped forward. Mr. Vaskon addressed the Judge:

"Judge, I jest can't sit on this here jury."

"Why not?" demanded Judge Varey.

"I got fourteen cows to home." There was entreaty in his voice. His eyes were pleading. "My wife died on me last spring, and I aint got no hired man. Them cows is all fresh, and they has to be milked."

Judge Varey caught sight of Captain Field, who had entered a few minutes before, and motioned him to the bench.

"Where do you live?" the Judge asked the farmer.

"'Bout two miles south of North Point. They aint no near neighbors."

Judge Varey hesitated.

"Do you know this man?" he asked Captain Field.

"No, Your Honor," Captain Field admitted. There was a twinkle in his eyes. "But he doesn't have to worry about the cows. We will take very good care of them for him."

Stark consternation appeared on Vaskon's face.

"But I got a hoss and wagon waitin' for me in a stable here in town. I was on my way home from the creamery when the deppity slaps the paper on me, and brings me right in. I got to get home, Judge."

Again Captain Field was equal to the occasion:

"We will see that the horse gets home," he promised.

Judge Varey hastened to make full use of this object-lesson.

"If you are chosen for jury-duty, you will be given an opportunity to tell Captain Field what has to be done at your farm." His voice grew stern. "My pa-

tience has reached the limit. I want you to answer every question truthfully." The trace of a smile appeared on his face. "You are just the type of man we want on this jury."

The District Attorney, after a short examination, reached the same conclusion.

"Satisfactory to the defense," came the verdict from opposing counsel.

Terror was evident in Vaskon's eyes.

"But Judge—" he began.

"Swear the juror," Judge Varey ordered. "Your cows will be in safe hands."

"Safe and tender hands, Your Honor," Captain Field amended.

MESSRS. David and Crosby, looking sleepy-eyed and resentful, and wearing their oldest civilian clothes, emerged from the kitchen of the barracks, laden down with packages. They paused at the window presided over by Max Payton, the top sergeant.

"Max, do you have any idea how long this Gardeck trial will last?" Mr. David asked.

Mr. Payton assumed a judicial look.

"They are having trouble getting a jury. Allow two more days for that. Give the prosecution and defense each a day to open their case. That shoots one week."

He consulted a list.

"The prosecution has called thirty-seven witnesses. They will take at least a week. Allow the same for the defense. The rebuttal shouldn't take more than two or three days. Count in the motions and the summations, and you ring up another week. That makes four. Give the judge a day for his charge. Of course, you can't tell how long any jury will be out, but I think a little better than a month will see the whole thing washed up."

He smiled on them blandly.

"Anything else, gentlemen?"

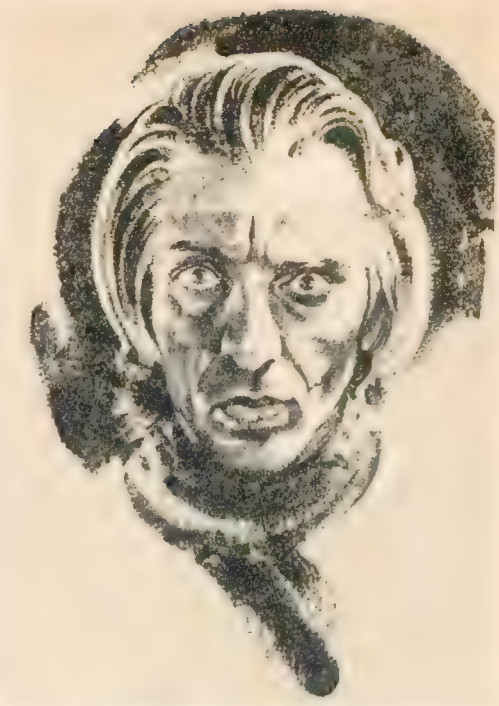
"You forgot one thing, Max," moaned Mr. Crosby. "If the District Attorney should become a mother, they would adjourn for several weeks, and that would drag it well into the second month."

They moved on. Mr. Payton began to hum. They caught a fragment of the refrain: *"Just an old cow-hand from the Rio—"*

Mr. David turned to his companion.

"I believe you are the gentleman who said that this Judge Varey is an eminent jurist."

Mr. Crosby hastened his progress toward the door; but when he stepped outside, he realized that this was no haven of safety.



Terror was in Vaskon's eyes. "But Judge—" he began.

Sergeant Henry Linton stood near the head of an unkempt, discouraged-looking horse, which had its front feet spread well apart, apparently in an effort to keep from falling. Attached to the horse was a farm wagon, which held four ten-gallon milk-cans. Seated on the bank near by was an expectant audience.

"WHOA, Seabiscuit!" Mr. Linton made a desperate grab at the bridle of the motionless horse. He touched his hat smartly as the luckless pair approached. "Very spirited animal. Must be the thoroughbred in him."

Mr. David looked at Mr. Crosby. Mr. Crosby looked at Mr. David. Mr. David, deciding that surrender was better than an argument before the present company, picked up the reins.

"I wonder if they are 4-H Club boys?" came the question from the crowd.

"Can't be," declared another disguised voice. "They don't look healthy."

An impromptu quartet went into action: *"How're you going to keep them down on the farm?"*

Mr. David decided that there had been enough of this.

"Get up, Man-of-War," he ordered.

The horse moved one foot experimentally and dreamily.

"Whoa!" came the command from the crowd.

The animal returned to its former state of inertia.

Captain Field spoke from an open window:

"Maybe I made a mistake. I see some good milkers in that crowd."

Mr. David waited hopefully.

"That shows how careless hired help can ruin us farmers," mourned Mr. David.

"Get started," Captain Field ordered.

"Get up, Charley," Mr. David ordered. He slapped the reins.

The horse moved slowly out the drive, and turned north on the main road.

"It could have been worse," Mr. Crosby admitted. Then his optimism vanished. "That 'Charley' inspiration of yours will get us an extra week."

"What's an extra week among fourteen cows?" Mr. David demanded.

"Seven apiece," Mr. Crosby mused.

"Wrong again, professor," Mr. David asserted. "I'm doing the cooking." He made a mental calculation. "Ten cows for Mrs. Crosby's boy to milk."

Mr. Crosby brightened.

"What are we going to eat?"

Mr. David indicated various packages.

"Bacon—ham—eggs."

"Go on," Mr. Crosby directed.

"Eggs—ham—bacon. That's all that I know how to cook."

"After two days of that," Mr. Crosby declared, "it won't seem worth milking three extra cows."

They rode on slowly, in silence.

"Who do you think let that dope-car slip through?" Mr. Crosby asked.

"If I knew," Mr. David asserted, "he would be in line for some milking."

"Then why should the Skipper pick on us?"

Mr. David hummed a paraphrase of a song: *"That's why lieutenants are born."*

Mr. Crosby groaned.

"I can stand the rest. But don't sing."

The road wound its way north.

"Do you know this place?" Mr. Crosby asked.

"No, but I know where Joe Turner lives. His Nibs said it was the next turn to the left."

"That's only about three miles from Canada," said Mr. Crosby hopefully. "Maybe in a new country we could get a fresh start." He subsided into his former state of gloom. "I doubt if this nag will make it."

"They have cows in Canada," Mr. David objected.

"How about Java? But it probably has an extradition treaty with the United States."

The horse, without any guidance, turned into a dirt road on the left. Tiny David glanced at a mailbox, which bore the legend *"Delmo Vaskon."* The horse quickened its gait.

"Stop him," Mr. Crosby begged. "Such speed! I just can't stand it."

Mr. David pointed ahead.

"Take a whiff of your smelling-salts before you look at the ancestral estate."

The house was a one-story log affair. The barn was larger, and in slightly better condition. Near its doors, at the end of a field used for pasture, were fourteen cows, patiently waiting to be milked.

Mr. Crosby groaned.

"Which comes first, food or cows?"

"Ladies first," said Mr. David.

THEY carried their packages into the house, which was almost unbelievably dirty.

"Phew!" Tiny David's face mirrored his disgust. "A stiff broom, plenty of soap and water, and a good day's work

are what is needed most here." He glanced about. "He has a telephone, but no radio. I'll miss the war news."

"Probably be a relief to Winston Churchill to know that you aren't second-guessing on him," declared Mr. Crosby, who entered the sleeping-room, where he gave his attention to examples of leg-art pasted on the walls. "Our Mr. Vaskon is a man of parts. He may be a cow-man, but he has other interests."

"Tear yourself away from that stocking ad," Mr. David directed. "The creamery probably sterilized those empties we brought back, but you better take them to the spring-house and give them the once-over. While you are doing that, I'll unhook Charley, give him his supper, and bed him down for the night. We can't forget Charley."

"I wish I could," Mr. Crosby muttered: "but there are fourteen cows to remind me of him."

MR. DAVID finished caring for the horse, and went to the cow-barn, where he met Mr. Crosby, a milk-can in each hand.

"I thought you said the creamery sterilized these," Mr. Crosby began.

"Didn't they?"

"One of them, they didn't touch! I sloshed enough water in and out of it to do the trick."

"That won't hurt you," Tiny David declared. "While we are on the subject of cleanliness, we might both wash our hands." He sniffed at his fingers. "There seems to be a slight odor connected with Charley."

They performed that task, and then again approached the cow-barn, where the main job of the afternoon awaited them.

"I got all the dope from the Skipper," Tiny David explained. "After we have given each of the girls a bit of hay to munch on, we let them in. They all know their places. That's more than you can say for some people, as the Skipper was careful to point out when he told me."

Mr. Crosby mounted to the loft, and soon hay poured down. Then Mr. Crosby's face appeared in the opening.

"This reminds me of a poem. It's about Maud Somebody raking hay on a summer afternoon. That's all I remember, except that a judge rode by, and went for Maud in a big way."

"A girl doesn't have chances like that these days," Mr. David objected. "The judge stays in the courthouse, and helps a guy with a sour sense of humor make milkmaids out of other guys."

They swung the doors open, and stood aside watching their charges find their appointed stalls.

"Wonderful, isn't it?" Tiny David mused. "If Vaskon can train cows like that, he might be able to civilize the Skipper."

"Maybe," Mr. Crosby admitted. "But we won't live that long."

The cows became motionless, and the barn was filled with the sound of contented chewing.

"The lady in the third stall from the door is Mae West," Mr. David explained.

"I have special instructions regarding her. She is what is known in the trade as a tough milker, but she reacts to kindness. I'll start on her, before I have used up what little kindness I have left."

THEY found milk-buckets, washed them, and went to work. The sound of well-directed streams of fresh milk splashing against tin blended with the steady crunching of hay.

"Just like home," murmured Mr. Crosby, his head half-buried in the flank of a cow. "Whoa, there!" Quick work with his knees saved an almost-full bucket. "You may have Mae West, but I drew a naughty number."

Their fingers grew more limber as the task progressed. One of the forty-quart cans was filled, and closed. Mr. Crosby removed the lid from a second can, and poured in the contents of his bucket. Soon Mr. David made a like contribution. After a time Mr. Crosby made his second offering, but milk gushed from the top of the can and spilled on the floor.

"There go the profits," mourned Mr. David. "That shows how careless hired help can ruin us farmers."

Mr. Crosby stood staring at the overfilled can.

"That's the can the creamery didn't wash," he asserted. "I remember that scratch on the side." He turned to his companion. "How many times did you ante up in that can?"

"Once," said Mr. David.

"That can is supposed to hold ten gallons," Mr. Crosby continued. "This was my second trip, and it wouldn't hold it. How much do you suppose these buckets hold?"

"Two gallons, at the most," Tiny David estimated. "But what's this all about? Are you trying to put things on an efficiency basis, or are you just hoping that you can talk while I milk?"

Mr. Crosby stuck to his guns.

"I'll try to make this so simple you can understand it: If one bucket holds two gallons, how much should three buckets of the same size hold?"

"Six gallons," said Tiny David.

"Right, Mr. Einstein. Now try this one on your adding-machine: Why should six gallons, or twenty-four quarts, fill a can that is marked forty quarts?"

Mr. David deserted his cow.

"Get another can," he ordered.

Mr. Crosby obeyed. They poured the contents of the overflowing can into it. The liquid failed to come near the top.

"There's money in this business," Mr. Crosby declared. "Brother Vaskon has been giving the creamery what is jokingly called a fine cleaning."

"He has not!" Tiny David retorted. "A farmer's milk is poured into a vat, and weighed. The farmer gets paid by the hundredweight. The can doesn't figure in the transaction."

He found a stick, marked the outside height of the empty can, and thrust the stick into the top of the receptacle. The stick struck bottom many inches before the mark reached the top of the can.

Crosby whistled softly.

Tiny David turned the can upside-down, and examined the bottom, which appeared to be firmly in place. He produced a knife, and went to work. A disk of tin shot away from the can. They peered in, and found a second bottom of the can, which was a good ten inches above the one they had removed.

Crosby fairly danced about in his excitement, as he cried:

"That's the answer to—"

"Maybe," Tiny David admitted. His broad forehead was wrinkled in thought. "They could bring the stuff across the line on foot. That would make it easier for them to get by the Federal men at the border. They could deliver it to Vaskon. He could put it in the bottom of this can, and then fill the can with milk."

"There's no 'could' about it," Crosby retorted. "That's how they got through our patrols five miles south of the line. The boys wouldn't fool with a farmer on his way to the creamery. Even if they

"Very spirited animal," said Mr. Linton, as the luckless pair approached.

did, that can is good enough to stand inspection." His face was a trifle red. "I washed it, you know."

Tiny David nodded.

"I can tell you why you had to wash it. Vaskon met the gang south of our patrols. He turned over the dope, dumped the milk, and left the can somewhere, so he could pick it up on the return trip. He wouldn't take a chance on creamery-men handling it, even when it was empty. When *they* wash a can, they make a job of it."

"Put a gold star on the blackboard for them," Crosby agreed. "But not for you. When I pour milk into a can, I know how much milk that can should hold. That was what gave you a chance to do all this high-power deduction."

"SHUT up a minute!" Tiny David ordered. "Vaskon was on his way home from the creamery early this morning, according to the Skipper, when a deputy sheriff tagged him for jury-duty, and took him right along. It is a good bet the delivery had been made then. The Skipper got his squawk from the Syrchester police early this afternoon. That allowed just about enough time to run the stuff down, and get it into circulation."

"So what?" Mr. Crosby demanded.

"Don't you see? This must have been a cash transaction, all along the line, because those rats don't trust each other. Vaskon hasn't been home since then, so he probably has the money on his person. It's a cinch that the Canadian delegates will be hot after their share." A crooked grin played over his face. "Put on your best dress right after supper, Agnes. It is a good hunch that we'll have company tonight."

His grin disappeared as he started away.

"See you later. Got some telephoning to do."

He walked to the house, called the courthouse, and after some delay had the sheriff brought to the telephone.

"Hello, Joe. Tiny David. Court still in session?"

"Yes," came the disgusted answer. "Judge Varey is sore, and he threatens to hold night sessions."

"Has a juror named Vaskon asked to use the telephone?"

"Has he?" The sheriff chuckled. "Has me most crazy. I've stalled him off by telling him he'll get a smack at the telephone, with a deputy listening, when we get bedded down for the night in the Central House."

"Good," said Tiny David. "But don't let any of the jurors use the telephone even then. And don't let them send any messages. Understand?"

"Sure," the sheriff agreed. "But what's it all about?"

"Tell you later," Tiny promised.

He waited until the connection was broken, then gave the operator the number of the barracks.

MR. LINTON acted as if he had expected the call.

"It's nice of you to call up and thank me," he declared.

"Thank you for what?" asked Tiny.

"For subscribing to *Barn and Kitchen* for you. You'll want something to read, when you aren't milking."

"Never mind that," Tiny David ordered. "Get this: When court adjourns for the day, the Gardeck jury will be taken to the Central House."

"That's right," Mr. Linton admitted. "And they have no cows to milk."

Mr. David ignored the pleasantry.

"You slip down there, fix it with the deputies, and give Vaskon a good frisk."

"Your *boss?*" There was disbelief in Mr. Linton's voice. "Oh, yeah! You want me to get measured for a dairymaid's costume! Thanks just the same; I'll walk."

Mr. David sighed as he slipped into his best official manner.

"This is an order, Linny: You go down there and frisk Vaskon."

"Yes sir. What am I supposed to find?"

"A lot of money."

"Swell!" declared Mr. Linton. "What do I do with it?"

"You give it back to him."

"That wouldn't be in character." Mr. Linton protested.

"Never mind that," Tiny David overruled. "You give it back to him. Then you call me here." He gave Linton the telephone number.

"Yes, Lieutenant," said Mr. Linton; and his use of the title showed that he still had slight enthusiasm for the job.

Mr. David returned to the cow-barn, where a very much discouraged Mr. Crosby greeted him.

"So here you are! Good. Greta Garbo, Joan Crawford, Hedy Lamarr, Myrna Loy and Ginger Rogers are still waiting."

They finished the milking. The full cans were placed in the spring-house to keep cool. Then they returned to the house.

"Any chickens to feed?" Mr. Crosby demanded.

"There don't seem to be," Mr. David admitted. "But you can lend a hand with the supper."

BY comparison with the handiwork of the Filipino chef at the barracks, the meal suffered—and Mr. Crosby did not hesitate to point out that fact.

"After a man eats five eggs," Mr. David decided, "he's disqualified as a critic."

They made quick work of the dishes. Mr. Crosby stretched his arms, and declared: "Guess I'll get a little fresh air. This place has a bit of an odor."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," Tiny David retorted. "We're expecting company. That company is coming to see Vaskon. Give them one look at you, and we'll be as lonely as if we didn't use the right kind of mouthwash."

THEY sat through a long evening. There was nothing to read. They completely exhausted the subject of Captain Field and his shortcomings. Even renaming the cows began to pall.

Darkness brought a storm, which came howling out of the northwest. Tiny David hung soiled bedclothing over the windows, and lighted a kerosene lamp. They sat listening to the downpour of rain, which was interspersed with vivid flashes of lightning, and deafening thunder.

The telephone-bell sent Tiny David hurrying to the instrument.

"This is Linny. I frisked Vaskon. He had seven thousand dollars. Yes sir, seven grand. Nearly broke my heart to give it back to him, but I did. What next, Tiny?"

"Did you have any trouble?"

Mr. Linton chuckled.

"Not a bit. Just to make it look good, I frisked the other eleven. Told 'em it was regular procedure on a murder-trial. All I got was some doubtful telephone numbers."

"Good enough," Tiny David told him.

The storm reached new heights of fury. A particularly loud blast of thunder was followed by a knock on the door, which sounded almost like an echo.

David and Crosby leaped to their feet. Their hands strayed to hip pockets, and two guns appeared. Crosby backed into one corner of the room. David disguised his voice, as he called:

"Who's there?"

The bolted door shook.

"Open up, you fool! It's Morceau."

Tiny David drew back the bolt, and stepped aside. A rain-drenched, irate, dark-complexioned man entered the room, and stood blinking in the dim light.

"Where's Vaskon?" demanded the visitor. He drew back, and his hand crept toward a pocket.

"Keep your hand away from that!" Tiny David ordered. A quick step carried him between Morceau and the door. "We're handling things for Vaskon. Sit down. We'll have a long talk about how we are going to split that seven grand."

A snarl crossed Morceau's face.

"The old double-cross! Vaskon isn't going to get away with this. You birds

have the drop on me, but we'll get around to Vaskon later. He's in this up to his neck. We'll fix him."

Tiny David chuckled.

"That's enough." His gun was trained on Morceau. "Tie him up, Jim. I'll keep him covered."

Crosby hastened to obey, amid abuse and profanity from the dope-runner.

"Choke that off," Tiny David ordered. "My, my, my, I hope the girls in the barn didn't hear that!"

Morceau was bound and gagged. Tiny David looked at his wrist-watch. "Quarter after two," he mused. "Just the shank of the morning." He grinned broadly as he picked up the receiver, worked the hook to attract a sleepy operator, and gave her the number of the barracks.

The night sergeant answered promptly.

"Is Captain Field sleeping in tonight?" Tiny David asked.

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"Call him to the telephone."

There was a long wait.

"Well?" Captain Field's question was a cross between a snarl and a bark, and contained the worst qualities of both.

"Was the Captain sleeping?" Tiny David's voice was very bland. "Sorry to disturb him, but there's something I forgot to ask, and it's very important. How long are these cows going to have the pleasure of our company, sir?"

The expected explosion came. Captain Field was nothing if not thorough. He started on the David family five generations back, and brought it up to 1940. Then he devoted his attention to Tiny David's personal habits, and followed that with a prophecy regarding his dismal future. The night sergeant, in discussing that outburst later, declared he had learned eight new words, and that Captain Field had not once repeated himself.

EVEN Captain Field, however, had his limitations. When his ample vocabulary was exhausted, he concluded with the blunt and ringing declaration:

"You'll be with those cows until this trial is over, and each night I'll thank God for the relief I have received."

"Thank you, sir. That means we will be back at the barracks today."

"What's that?" There was disbelief in Captain Field's voice.

"The trial ends today, sir. The Captain said we could kiss the cows good-by as soon as it was over, so he can look forward to seeing us about—"

"Go on." There was a grim note of warning in Captain Field's statement. "You and Crosby are just a short distance from the relief-rolls, so you might as well have a good time until you get there. I'll even bite, and ask you why the trial is going to end today."

"Judge Varey is going to declare a mistrial, sir," Tiny David asserted.

"Why?" barked Captain Field. "And how do you know? Can one of the cows tell fortunes?"

"This tip came straight from the stables," Tiny David admitted. "One of the jurors is a dope-runner."

"Which one?" The voice was a bit unsteady.

"Vaskon, sir. Maybe the Captain remembers him. He is the one the Captain was so keen to have on the jury. If you will recall, sir, you went out of your way to—"

"Hum-m-m-m." Captain Field cleared his throat warningly. "This better be good. Let's have it."

Tiny David told him the story of the milk-can with the false bottom. He told of Linton's finding the money on Vaskon. He described the visit of Morceau, and the unguarded words that definitely had linked Vaskon with the narcotic ring.

CAPTAIN FIELD, following the example of no less a person than Napoleon, decided a strong attack might cover fatal weaknesses in a defense position.

"All right!" he barked. "Why do you have to hang on a telephone at three o'clock in the morning, and hash this thing over? You've been in this outfit long enough to know what to do. Bring in your prisoner, and book him."

"But the cows, sir!" Tiny David protested. "The Captain promised Mr. Vaskon that they would have tender and loving care. And Charley has to be considered. I mean the horse, sir."

Captain Field, even as Napoleon, recognized defeat.

"Wait until daylight. Get your milking done. Then come in." There was a pause. "Don't make any plans about going back. Some of the good milkers I saw outside my window yesterday will get a workout. It may be some time before we get Vaskon's affairs settled."

"Yes sir." Tiny David was grinning. "We'll give the girls quick service, and get in right away. I hope Charley can stand it. I mean the horse, sir. We are going to be quite a load on Charley."

Dynamite At Dunkerque

An epic tragedy of this war as seen by a sailor aboard one of the heroic rescue ships.

THE tug came for us just after breakfast as the barge lay in the London River on that lovely summer day. Everything seemed so quiet and peaceful that one could not believe there was a war on at all. The silence was broken by a hoarse voice as I was finishing my cup of tea.

"Come on, heave up, sailor-man. We've got a job for you," shouted a naval officer from the bridge of the gray-painted tug. "You needn't set any sails—we'll tow you."

The crew mustered in a moment and were soon at the windlass forward.

Clank-ety-clank, clank-ety-clank; slowly the great anchor-chain crept inward through the hawsepipe while the tug steamed and hissed impatiently alongside. For aboard of us everything was worked by hand, and five thousand square feet of canvas was our only means of progression.

As we paused to fleet the chain across the barrel, we asked the tug-crew what the job was.

"You're bound fer Dunkerque," they said, "to get the chaps out of there."

So that was what we were wanted for! Well, no better vessel than a London sailing barge could be had, for our vessel was as flat-bottomed as a frying-pan, drawing only three feet of water aft and two feet forward, although capable of carrying two hundred and fifty tons of cargo.

Within a couple of hours we were at Tilbury, and later in the day had an electric charge put through us, being steel built, as a protection against magnetic mines. This is a temporary measure known as being "wiped."

Next day found us in Dover loading boxes of ammunition and forty tons of dynamite. As we laid there alongside the quay, vessels of all sorts and sizes were coming in, their decks packed with steel-helmeted troops. There were battered destroyers, paddle-boats, small steamships and tenders, some looking spick and span, and some showing gaping holes in their sides and upper-works. One little steam drifter had her funnel at an angle of forty-five degrees, part of her bridge ripped off by machine-gun bullets, and numerous indentations in her rusty sides. There were a lot of wounded on her deck being dressed by other soldiers; and the man at the wheel, clad in a pair of canvas slacks and a brilliant red-and-white football jersey, was a mass of bandages and sticking-plaster. He took her over to Dunkerque again that night.

WE finished loading in the evening, and before dark set out under tow of a steam tug. We were not alone. Coming away from Ramsgate, Deal and Folkestone were all sorts of small craft, steamboats, barges, lifeboats, yachts, and little pleasure launches. We looked like Newport (U.S.) on an *America's* Cup Day.

Fortunately, the weather was fine. In fact it was too fine, for just after dark we made a streak of brilliant phosphorescence in the sea. That was the undoing of many of this rag-tag and bob-tail fleet. Jerry Heinkel spotted the sparkle of our wake, and down he came. First he bombed us with a salvo of four. They fell in the sea off our starboard quarter, and the explosions lifted us clean out of the water. The towing wire twanged like a violin-string, but did not break. Down came the barge with a crack, into the sea, and on we went. Her bottom must have been blown a good three or four feet out of the water. It was a good job she was well built and not too old.

REAL EX-

For details of our Real Experience

The tug belched black smoke to try and cover up the telltale wake, but Jerry had got a good sight of us, and down he came. We all nipped down below when he started machine-gunning, and the bullets were popping off our deck and sides like peas off a drum. They beat a sort of devil's tattoo on our steel hull, and the windows of the wheelhouse were neatly taken out by a stream of lead which ricocheted off the main hatch coamings. Once the young sergeant who had shipped with us from Dover went on deck, thinking the airplane had gone, but a burst of fire brought him down to the cabin again with his left eyebrow clipped off by a bullet. The cook patched him up, and during a lull we all went up on deck once more.

As we neared Dunkerque another airplane dropped bombs near us, but they were well wide of the mark and only made the barge shudder a bit. The young sergeant told us that they had had this bombing and machine-gunning almost continuously during the retreat to the coast; and that although British planes were bringing down large numbers of enemy machines, the Germans seemed to have thousands and thousands of men in the air.

He was very bitter about the retreat. "We had Jerry whacked at Arras," he said with boyish enthusiasm. "We recaptured the town, and could have reached the French lines—and then the Belgians packed up and exposed all our flank. We had to extend out over thirty miles, and then we were too weak to hold 'em. But don't tell us the German army is unbeatable. All we want is the same number of tanks and planes they've got."

He was full of confidence and far from dispirited. And he was only about twenty-four years of age.

As we neared the harbor, the din of exploding bombs and naval gunfire was terrific. We were told not to clench our teeth or the noise would split our eardrums. So we nosed into the harbor, breathing smoke through our mouths and looking for a bit of quayside that had not been smashed up. Soon we were alongside and tied up, one end to the wreck of a crane, and the other to a lone lamp-post. The northern part of the town was all on fire, and the crackle and blast of a dozen furnaces added to the hellish din of the bombs. That part of the town which was not on fire appeared to be blown to pieces. I looked for any sign of the English Bar, where we used to go and get Kentish ale in better days; but all that could be seen was a mass of rubble and burnt timber. In the harbor itself floated the wreckage of small boats and other débris and the ghastly remains of human bodies.

SOLDIERS jumped aboard the barge, and soon discharged the ammunition into two lorries. This was for the troops holding the line north of the town. Then we were towed out of the harbor and round to the beach abreast of Malo. Most of the buildings here still stood, and, except for a few fires, did not look anything like the devastated area round the harbor.

Bombs continued to fall as we were shoved head-first on the beach. By this time it was daylight, and several airplanes came and machine-gunned the soldiers on the beach. We saw them firing back with Bren guns, and one plane crashed right in the middle of the town with a deafening explosion. More bombs came, looking like strings of sausages in the air. We saw a paddle-

PERIENCES

story contest, see page 3.

boat hit on the stern and settle slowly down in the shallow water.

Meanwhile, a party of soldiers attempted to unload our forty tons of dynamite, while we ferried others off to waiting ships in our small boat. Sixteen at a time we were rowing off in a boat designed to carry six. But the men were very calm and stolid, and there was no panic as to who should go first. An officer with a megaphone on the beach called out every now and then.

"Four more," he would say. And the next four in the queue would step into the boat, sometimes with a thankful grin and often with such remarks as: "Let's get home in time for dinner."

Once we saw three British Spitfires attack a bunch of German bombers and fly clean through their formation. Three Germans came down in the sea; and the Spitfires, flying at tremendous speed, disappeared in the clouds. Each time a German plane came down, the soldiers cheered and shouted:

"That'll teach you, you—"

We never got the dynamite discharged. A fresh wave of bombers came over the hills, flying very low; and under a hail of bombs and machine-gun bullets the soldiers were forced to bolt for cover of the sand-dunes—poor cover, but better than the open beach. We were ordered to get away from the barge on account of the dynamite, and needing no second bidding, we pulled out to a waiting ferry-boat with our last party of soldiers. Within a few minutes we were on our way back to England. We had two more bombing attacks on the way over, but by then we were used to them, and the first feeling of "no stomach" had gone.

ALL our crew were frank in confessing that the first few bombs scared them, but they soon got used to it, and carried on their work without taking any notice of the explosions, except to duck if they heard anything whistling a bit close.

We got back to Dover that night, and next morning reported ourselves in London to hear the welcome news that we could have a month's holiday on pay. For which we were duly thankful.

What happened to the barge? I have heard since that she was left there until the Germans came down on the beach with some of their artillery. Then our navy shelled her and blew her up, complete with a great deal of the aforesaid German artillery.

WILD HORSE

A Wyoming cowboy sends us this one.

By CECIL SMITH

THE little band of wild horses seen from between my pony's ears was as motionless as the surrounding desert on which they stood. I'd probably never seen them at all, if it hadn't been for the straightening of my pony's ears, as if he were pointing them out to me.

I watched the band for some time while waiting for my pony to blow, and for Flaxey to catch up. They enjoyed the sunshine, especially the little colts, who were lying outstretched and trying to absorb all of that that their little silky hides could catch. The older horses were standing apparently half-asleep except maybe for a twitch of an ear or a shift of weight from one leg to another, and the occasional swish of a long tail. Off to one side could be seen two old mares in a social combat of scratching each other's hides.

When Flaxey catches up to where I'm sitting and sees the sight I'm squinting at, he suggests to me to wait there in the shade of my pony, and he'd ride back down a dry wash so as to keep out of sight of the wild bunch, and notify some of the boys.

As the afternoon came and went, and evening was drawing near, the shadows from the little hills and ridges began to eat their way across the big flats. The sorrel stallion moved the bunch into a walk; head down, nostrils dilated sniffing the ground, he headed off down the slope and out toward the flat. One by one the bunch followed in single file.

Suddenly riders came sashaying in from all sides. Amid the pounding sounds of running hoofs, was mixed shrill yells and shouts as we hazed the wild bunch out toward a certain scope of country where was hidden a clever wild-horse trap.

The big stallion left his place in the lead to an old gray fly-specked mare that was doing a mighty good job in lining out over the country. The sorrel dropped in behind the main bunch of his herd, and persuaded the laggers to greater speed by sharp teeth-popping nips.

Often the big sorrel tried to outwit his pursuers by tricks of wild-horse strategy used successfully for years during his reign over this little bunch. But every time he would cut the bunch off at some sharp angle, or try a back-track around some mountain-side, there would always be some cowboy waiting there on a fresh horse, to haze them on again at greater speed.

Away out on the flat, a big dust was coming—coming mighty fast. The boys at the "hold-up," which kept well out of sight and in a smaller corral back farther from the winged trap, could already see the leaders of the wild bunch. Way back on the flat a cowboy squalled. Then another. Each buckaroo at the hold-up started testing his rigging and feeling out his rope.

The saddle-stock that had been standing half asleep began to throw their heads and fidget. Then another squall, and the wild bunch heaves into sight. There must be thirty head, all running like mule-tailed deer, and heading straight for the trap. Another yell and a little later, riders can be distinguished. As the wild bunch got abreast the wings, four riders came up on each side and camped on their hocks all the way in.

The wild bunch hit the hold-up, but only for a jiffy, till they came busting right on through. Ropes were singing, and things were happening mighty fast. Two ropes managed to settle around the sorrel's neck before he busted his thirteen hundred pounds against the heavy timbers of the trap.

Several of the boys got their mounts jerked down, and one cowboy managed to get more than his share, when he piled his loop around a pony's neck plus one of the corral posts.

When the herd hit his rope, there was a smashing of timber and a popping of saddle-leather. That cowboy's horse was jerked flat to the ground, and the cowboy was sent sailing through thin air to mother earth. All that cowboy could see from that position was a jumbled mass of running hoofs.

When things cleared up a bit and sort of quieted down, I could see a mighty big gap in the side of the corral fence where a whole panel had been pulled flat. And out of that gap disappeared the biggest part of the wild ones, also a number of saddle-stock which we had used in the hold-up. The remainder of the wild ones were lying scattered around and tied down in the big corral. And among them was the sorrel.

Two cowboys got their riggings stripped off their ponies. And two wild horses lay near the corral fence with broken necks, where they had connected too hard with the heavy corral timbers. There was also one other, hobbling off trying to make a run for it on three legs.

I DIDN'T help the boys on the three-day trail to the railroad siding, with the gatherings we'd made. The Old Man sent me back to headquarters with three other boys. So I wasn't there when the wild ones were loaded and the big doings happened to Flaxey. What I know is what the Old Man told me later.

Seems like, the way the wild bunch got out of the railroad stockyards during the

night surely had 'em all about licked there for a while. But by cutting sign and riding hard, evidences were picked up just out of town.

There were tracks, all right; they all started from one point as if they all of a sudden hit the ground and started running from there. But how the tracks got there, just about had the whole outfit whipped.

None of the cowboys cared much if the horses got away—not even the Old Man. He was even heard to say: "Too bad I didn't think of it, and I'd turned 'em loose myself." And a big grin spread over his wrinkled face.

So you can see how sorry he felt when he first saw the tracks and learned that every last horse was afoot and free, and judging from the trail of dust that was spotted by one of the Government planes, the missing ponies were making mighty fast time back in the direction of the wild-horse country.

From far off to the right and making mighty fast time also was another trail of dust—a smaller dust. Looked from the plane like it was made by one horse. Sure enough, it was none other than the sorrel stallion, and sittin' in his middle was a cowboy with a mat of flaxen hair. He was riding low and sending the sorrel for all he was worth.

That was the sorrel's last long run. He was going mighty gallant. His proud head carried high, white tail and mane flying in the breeze, he was getting over the ground in mighty long easy strides. It was a picture that for a time made the pilot almost hold his breath. . . .

It seems that on coming back to the yard, when all townsfolk were sound asleep, Flaxey had had very little trouble in spooking the wild ones up the chute, and into the empty cars that were standing ready for that purpose. Once the horses were inside and the door firmly fastened, the rest was easy.

Flaxey, with the help of Yellow Jacket, his top "cut horse," and by the use of his "whale line," which was tied hard and fast to the tree of his saddle at one end, and the other connected with the freight-car, didn't take long. One healthy long pull with Yellow Jacket sitting back on the rope, and the car full of wild horses moved quietly down the grade, out of sight from town. And here Flaxey decided to turn them loose.

Before sliding back the car door and giving the bunch their freedom, Flaxey maneuvered a loop around the sorrel's neck and anchored him firm with a couple of half-hitches to the wall posts of the car he occupied.

After the dust had cleared from the last of the stampeding ponies, and with some mighty handy rope-work, Flaxey managed to front-foot and drag the sorrel out of the car and onto the ground. He had him throwed and tied in short order, and the distance to the stockyards and back, where Flaxey returned the empty cars, was covered in no time. Then he rode back to the sorrel, took saddle and bridle off Yellow Jacket, and turned him loose.

I reckon Flaxey sure thrilled at the touch of the sorrel's hide as he slipped his hackamore over his head and cinched his saddle to stay. He was prepared for a ride when he undone the foot-ropes, and had anchored his spurs to his boot-heels, and hobbled the rowels. He had even gone so far as to tie his slicker across the swells of his saddle. Flaxey was sure not aiming to be left afoot. This was a ride where contest rules would be put to one side. Just as soon as the foot-ropes were off, Flaxey was in the saddle.

THAT cowboy didn't put up no fight when he was cornered on the rim of the Snake River gorge. The sorrel ran to the edge and reared up—but it was too late: he went over. I'll bet there was a grin on that cowboy's face as both went over the two-hundred-foot drop-off.

No, there was no funeral; none was needed.

Some say he tried to throw himself loose before they both went over. But me, I'm keeping my opinion to myself. There was one cowboy that would never sell a horse's freedom, to see them pine their wild hearts out in waiting their turn to become fish-feed.

Something choked up inside of me when the Old Man told me of Flaxey. I stumbled out of the bunkhouse, for tears were stinging my eyes. I wanted to make the door, because I was afraid of going to pieces if anyone saw me.

I was sittin' alone on the feed-rack, when the Old Man found me. He set kickin' funny little designs in the logs with his spur-rowels for quite a while before he spoke.

"It's what he wanted, kid," said he finally. "It's something we all have coming, but Flaxey had his choice, and he took it just that way. He was too much the wild hoss himself, to have seen that pony take the jump alone."

After the death of her husband, a Michigan manufacturer, Mrs. Thomé went to Africa and bought a coffee plantation. Three years later she went back—and learned that the plantation was "all washed up." Then began her real adventuring in the jungle.

By BESSE THOMÉ

Savage Paradise

I WAS again foot-loose and unattached, as I had been three years before, when I first landed in Africa. I have to confess that I was not altogether sorry. The plantation would have kept me tied; and just then I didn't want to be tied. I had a daring idea that I would head an expedition of my own, and be the first white woman, as far as I knew, to penetrate some parts of the African jungle that a few men had known and written of, but no woman had seen.

My friends in Nairobi joined forces to get me organized. Best service of all, they got me Hans van Ness to be my guide; and I could not possibly imagine a better one. On more than one occasion he saved my life; and I found him always faithful, wise and untiring.

Van Ness was a Dutch settler, with a large family to support; and a bad crop year made him welcome this opportunity to earn some money. He knew the jungle and its dangers and how to meet them. For the round sum of eight hundred dollars a month, he supplied his services, and also all the equipment for the safari, which meant ammunition, wagons, oxen, saddle-horses, donkeys, fodder for beasts and food for humans—and the humans themselves, who included the cook, headman, porters and servant boys. Van Ness and I were the only white people in the outfit; and I was the only woman.

There were endless details in the way of permits and legal papers that had to be attended to; and Van Ness saved me several headaches by his handling of these matters. Wild as the jungle is, the British Government lets no one forget its sovereignty; and hunting permits are as necessary to the jungle lands as they are in civilized countries during the open season.

Eight hundred dollars a month sounds like a lot of money, but I could manage it; and the cost was in fact much less than it would have been, had I gone through the regulation channels to the outfitters of society travelers, who come by scores to take a timid poke at the edge of the jungle.

I motored to Nanyuki, from where we were to start, and found Van Ness all set.

My first introduction to savage tribes came under circumstances not wholly agreeable. One evening after the men had gorged themselves with food, they gathered about their fire, and began their fanfare of voice and drum which for want of a better word let me term their music.

But a sudden silence fell; and then I saw them all crowd around one drum,

and begin to chatter excitedly like a lot of magpies. Silence again for an instant; then the drummer began hammering out a rapid *rat-a-tat, rat-a-tat.* He came to an abrupt stop; and all were silent as the grave, intently listening. I too listened; and faintly at first, then with a resounding *boom-boom-boom,* I heard an answering drum. Again our drummer sounded a reply; and again came the response from down the valley. This alternation was repeated several times; then I turned inquiringly to Van Ness.

"Sounds like a Morse code," I said. "I do believe they're exchanging actual messages!"

"They are," he told me. "That is one of the mysteries of the African savage that will never be understood. Long before there was any Morse code, or any telegraph, they had their own—as you've just heard. In each tribe there are a few expert drummers who know the tribal codes, and can not only interpret them to their tribesmen, but can send them on to other tribes that are still more distant from the original senders."

OUR boys were gathered round the headman, gesticulating frantically—a thing natives always do when talking. Finally the headman left the group and walked over toward us. He stood at a respectful distance, waiting for Van Ness to notice him; it would not be permissible to speak until he did. But as soon as opportunity permitted, he explained in an excited mixture of English, Swahili dialect and gesture that there was to be a Masai ceremonial dance down the valley, and that the Masai boys in the personnel (which meant himself too) would like to go. With touching earnestness he added that they would surely return one hour before sunrise, and that to show their deep gratitude, they would labor on the morrow for memsahib until the skin was worn from their hands and feet.

"Oh, let them go, of course," I exclaimed. "And we'll go too!"

"Impossible!" Van Ness exploded. "You don't know what you're saying. It would be very dangerous—they don't permit any outsiders."

"But white men have seen these ceremonials," I argued, "and I can't see why a white woman shouldn't. Come, now—you can't deny you've seen them yourself?"

Thus cornered, he had to admit it; and I was quick to push my advantage.

"Well, then," I said, "I'm going! I came out here to see all that is to be seen. You needn't go with me," I added, "if you feel that way about it; I'll be perfectly safe with the headman and the other boys."

Van Ness repudiated that suggestion with a look more eloquent than speech, then shrugged resignedly, and consulted with the headman, who withdrew to talk to the others. There ensued a great deal of jabbering among them, and rolling of white eyeballs in my direction.

I went into my tent to make ready. When I came out, Van Ness was waiting for me with a hurricane lantern in his hand.

"So you're coming along!" I said. "I suppose you want to be able to give my friends a graphic account of my last moments."

There was no answering jest in his voice.

"I hope it won't turn out to be that," he said quietly.

In his tone was something that gave me a moment's surge of uneasiness; but I pushed it quickly from me. We set out, and it was almost midnight before we rounded a bend in the river, and saw about half a mile in the distance the flames of a great fire. The sight of it, and the near beat of the tom-tom, grim and ominous, involuntarily slowed our steps. Our natives took the lead, nervous and ill-at-ease; and for the first time I realized, with genuine regret, that my presence was spoiling the party for them. I told Van Ness to assure them that we would remain as much in the background as possible; and in fact as we drew near, we sought a place in the shadows outside the bright circle of the firelight, hoping to watch unseen.

A HUNDRED dancers were whirling madly around the leaping flames. A hundred more stood in a great circle, looking on. They all seemed to ignore us; yet covert glances in our direction told us our presence was not unknown. Our boys edged over toward the other natives, but by order of the headman all kept within calling distance.

Not far from where we stood there was a squat tree, rather like an overgrown bush, heavy with cone-shaped crimson blossoms, which caught the firelight and glowed like clusters of rubies. At sight of it I gave a gasp of admiration, which I called upon Van Ness to share.

"Ah, yes," he said, "it is very beautiful. But that is the sacred tree, whose flowers no one dares to touch."

I looked at it, completely fascinated.

"'But the serpent tempted her,'" I quoted softly.

"What's that?"

"Nothing," I rejoined hastily. "I was just thinking of the coincidence that the savages have their forbidden tree too."

Now suddenly I saw a creature approach the tree and stand under it, a creature so hideous that at first glimpse I involuntarily recoiled and clutched Van Ness by the arm.

"That's the witch-doctor," he said. "He has absolute power over the tribe. Watch their response to every gesture he makes. They fear him as they would the devil. He is the personification of all the voodoo they believe in."

I could not take my eyes from the creature. He was clothed in a leopard-skin; and his face was concealed by some kind of headgear meant to resemble an animal or a strange god. There was a wide red gash for the mouth, which was filled with leopard teeth; and the whole was surmounted with horns.

He began all at once to circle around the trunk of the tree, droning in a high, weird voice that kept time with the speed of the dancers. Then suddenly, with two or three long leaps, he ran to the circle of the performers and gave a bound that carried him astonishingly high into the air. The others immediately bounded too, then stood erect and motionless, their eyes glued upon the leader. Now from the darkness two natives brought a goat, and tied it to the sacred tree. The witch-doctor approached, a knife gleaming in his hand. By sheer reflex, I turned my head away; but immediately I forced myself to look.

THE knife flashed in the air; there was one swift stroke, and the animal's throat gushed blood. Quickly the witch-doctor caught the red stream in his hands, and sprinkled it all about him, meanwhile keeping up an unvarying chant in a high-pitched nasal voice.

For a moment the chant stopped; and deathlike silence prevailed as the witch-doctor bent over the quivering body of the sacrificial victim, his attitude suggesting that he was holding communion with an unseen spirit. The effect on the rest, dancers and onlookers both, was electric. Wild cries of ecstasy suddenly tore the air; the savages flung themselves in absolute abandon on the ground, writhing and screaming, until at last they lay exhausted, motionless and silent.

Then one by one they arose; and again the dance began. Once more the witch-doctor filled his hands with blood, and threw drops of it upon the backs of the dancers as they passed. It seemed to increase their momentum; the rhythm of the dance quickened; the chant rose higher, and the drums boomed more thunderously. Added to the rest of the racket, and furnishing what would be known in our drama as the comic relief, was the shrill chatter of a band of monkeys in trees near by, who sounded for all the world as if they were taking part, and knew what it was all about.

I TOOK a good look at those savages, and got an indelible impression of them: of ugly passionate faces, of nakedness smeared with red clay and coconut-oil—supple, beautiful bodies whose muscles rippled firmly beneath the painted skins. When they stood immobile, they were like copper statues against the firelight; and when they moved, it was with a perfection of muscular coördination.

The fire was dying down. The dancers and the others were leaving in groups. Van Ness was eager to depart; and the boys were standing behind him, waiting for memsahib to give the word for going back to camp. But I was in no hurry. This was just another native ritual to them, one of a countless number; but to me it was a unique experience, and I wasn't going to leave until it was over.

At last only a few of the revelers remained. My eyes fell upon the sacred tree, a scant dozen yards away. No one was near it; and the fire was so low that it was shrouded in gloom.

And now I knew how Mother Eve had felt. A few quick steps, and I held a large bunch of those luscious ruby blossoms in my hands. But before I could pluck another, my personal boy touched me on the arm; and that he did so in spite of knowing that the *kiboko* whip was the punishment for such familiarity, was proof of the strength of his emotion.

"Hapana! Hapana!" ("No! No!") he cried, gesticulating wildly. Three of the other boys joined him. Together, terror in their faces and no less in their speech, they jabbered warnings to me, which I could not understand. Later I learned that they were trying to tell me I was inviting a horrible death; but all I could make of it then, was that they con-

sidered it a sacred tree; and I certainly wasn't going to be deterred by their superstitions. So unheeding, I gathered another armful of blooms from a low-hanging branch.

The dying embers of the fire gave a sudden spurt of flame; and in its light I saw an object close to me, so hideous that my blood chilled in my veins. It moved toward me, making guttural sounds undeniably human, yet with such hissing and spitting and snarling that they seemed animal as well. When it was almost within arm's-reach, it began making wild movements with its hands. My boys were cowering back of me. I could not move. Subconsciously I was aware that it was the witch-doctor, playing leopard; but a real leopard could not have terrified me more.

Like a veritable angel out of heaven, Van Ness emerged from the darkness.

"It's time to go home," he said briefly. He ignored the witch-doctor; but I noticed that his hand rested on the butt of his revolver. In my paralysis, I had completely forgotten my own.

"Throw those flowers away—quick," he added. "I thought you realized they shouldn't be touched. I've told you many times that unless you know this vegetation, you mustn't handle it."

His voice was stern. There was no fight left in me. Like a scolded child, I dropped my head; and of course I threw the flowers far from me at his first word. The boys hurried on ahead, marking the path with the lanterns they carried, going at a faster pace than usual, and glancing back over their shoulders fearfully from time to time.

MY own emotions were mixed, with fear not entirely absent. I wondered if the jungle telegraph would be used to bring punitive parties upon the trail of the white woman who had committed the sacrilege. I was not sorry to push on rapidly.

But Nature proved quite capable of doing her own punishing. I became acutely aware of vicious pains in my face. My throat grew numb. My arms began to tingle. My eyes burned, and suddenly I could not see the path ahead.

I seized Van Ness by the sleeve.

"I'm blind!" I cried in terror. "And I'm numb all over. What shall I do?"

It seemed to me there was very little sympathy in his voice as he answered.

"The flowers are poison," he said. "I've tried to tell you about the vegetation here many times. Now you'll believe me. Now you know!"

I did know. Only a dim flickering light from the lanterns was visible through my closed eyes. I tried to open them, and the agony stabbed into my brain. The boys were chattering rapidly to one another, their voices tense and high-pitched. I knew they were discussing the curse on memsahib.

Van Ness evidently relented a little, for he said, his voice kindly: "There's some anti-toxin for snake-bite in the medicine chest that is also a specific for this. In the meantime, the important thing is not to let the boys see how you feel, for if they do, they'll be certain the witch-doctor's curse was effective. And if they thought that, the chances are they'd desert in a body."

That medicine-chest seemed to me as far away as Ohio. I was sure I'd be a goner before we could reach it. My arms by then were swollen to twice their normal size; and the blood was pounding through my veins with such pressure that I thought surely they would burst. Every step was agonized effort.

THERE was a sudden halt. I forced my eyes open sufficiently to glimpse Van Ness' raised rifle at a goat which, probably dazzled by our lights, stood motionless in the pathway. The slaughter of another innocent that night seemed more than I could stand. I seized the barrel of the rifle, and gave it an upward push as the goat sprang into the underbrush.

When at last camp was reached, Van Ness gave me an injection of the anti-toxin in each arm, suggested cold towels, and then went to bed. It was daybreak by then, but because we had turned night into day, we could stay here an extra twenty-four hours. They were hours of acute misery for me: but by the time the next day broke, my eyes were open again, and I was practically recovered, a sadder but a very much wiser woman.

One amusing outcome of the adventure Van Ness learned of through the headman. There was a nightly argument, it seemed, among the boys about memsahib's miraculous escape. There were those who held that she had voided the curse because she had saved the life of a goat on the homeward trail. But others contended that memsahib's own black box of magic had been too strong for the curse.

As far as I know, they never did settle the dispute.

Like "Dynamite at Dunkerque," this is a story of a ship to the rescue; but here old Dame Nature is the enemy.

The Crevasse

By NORMAN S. BATEMAN

WE were building a bridge over the Red River, in Louisiana. For use on the construction, I had brought to the site a small tugboat. It was because of this that a task was thrust upon me that nearly cost me my boat and my life, but was responsible for the saving of the lives of about fifty other persons who otherwise would most surely have perished.

In December the river began to rise until finally it reached a stage that forced me to suspend construction operations. This rise continued inexorably until finally the river reached a flood stage far above any height it ever had reached before.

For miles above and below my bridge-site, the river was retained by tremendous levees, so high that one could look down from their crests upon tree-tops and the roofs of one-story dwellings that dotted the countryside as far as the eye could reach. The right or south levee protected a vast flat valley some thirty miles wide that extended for about sixty miles to the Atchafalaya River. This valley, populated almost entirely by "Cajuns" (Louisiana French), was one of the most fertile, highly cultivated and densely populated agricultural sections of the State. A broken levee here during flood stage of the Red River would result in a major catastrophe, probably as frightful a flood catastrophe as this country has ever known. Consequently every resource of money and engineering skill and knowledge had been employed to make of it one of the strongest and best-constructed levees in the entire country. It had been built and was being maintained by the United States Government.

In comparison, the levee on the left or north bank was a weak makeshift affair. It protected only a small and relatively unimportant strip of cultivated land that paralleled the river; and from its northern boundary a huge swamp inhabited mostly by alligators and snakes, a swamp comparable to the Everglades of Florida, extended to the Black River. The inhabitants of the cultivated area were "Cajuns," too, but unlike their more fortunate neighbors across the river, were impoverished from their efforts to wrest a living from the poor land. But in their poverty they were as tenacious in their love of home and land as their French forebears.

When a levee was built on the south side of the river, in self-defense they had to build a levee on their side. And among these "forgotten" men a levee board was formed, and a small allotment was secured from the State Levee Board. This was amplified by contributions from their own meager resources; and using these limited funds to purchase tools and supplies, and contributing their own labor for the construction, these people built their levee. To them it was a personal thing, a protection for which they had toiled and sacrificed.

When it became evident that the river would rise above the crest of the levees, the Government immediately rushed its emergency forces of skilled engineers,

mechanics, equipment and supplies—to the south levee. Overnight thousands of laborers were employed filling sand-bags, and beginning with them a sandbag dike along the crest of the levee. Night and day the labor continued. And as the river rose, so rose a thick, compact, sturdy dike of sandbags, faced with a wall of lumber.

But on the opposite side of the river the situation was tragically different. A thin, woefully inadequate force of volunteer workmen and teams toiled frenziedly. If they should be unable to keep their dike abreast of that on the opposite side, the river would be forced over their levee, and their homes and crops and possessions would be destroyed. Their force consisted of every able-bodied man, boy and woman in the entire community, and many who were far from being able-bodied. As an animal will fight to protect its young, they toiled to save their homes. Their women fed the men as they labored, then fell to work beside them. Fences, outhouses, porches were sacrificed to furnish lumber for a facing wall, to be thinly reinforced with sandbags. But still the river rose.

SO it was that one morning before daylight I was summoned from bed by an urgent summons from a lady who was then director of the local chapter of the Red Cross. Breathlessly she told me that the north levee had broken through in two places, and that a number of men, women and children, who had been unable to escape, were marooned on a fast-crumbling levee, in imminent peril of their lives.

"Please," she begged, "get them off in your boat before they drown."

Colby, my pilot, and Benson, my engineer, lived in the same town, not far from there. I asked the lady to rout them out while I dressed and got out my car.

It would have been impossible to find two men better equipped for the dangerous undertaking before us than Colby and Benson. Both for years had followed the hazardous occupation of bridge-building, where coolness and gameness were requisites to personal safety. And both possessed these qualities to an exceptional degree.

In a short time we were racing the seven miles to where my boat was moored. When we got there, an excited crowd of farmers had already gathered. From them we learned that the marooned people were about three miles downstream on the opposite side of the river. While we were getting the boat trimmed and the engine started, dawn began to break, and as my gaze swept over the raging flood, my stomach began to crawl with dread at the scene.

Dimly seen in the ghostly dawnlight, in the center of the river where the current was swiftest, an apparently solid mass of débris and muddy foam about a hundred feet in width extending up and down as far as the eye could reach, swept by in a kaleidoscopic blur, humping along over the corrugated current waves like a monstrous serpent: Occasional trees with terrifyingly upthrust branches and roots, logs, dead animals, matted grass and cornstalks, and over all an obscene red muddy foam. Frequently a tree or a log momentarily gripped in the vortex of one of the numerous whirlpools would sweep in an arc, then shoot off at a tangent, and continue its wild race. But the thought that appalled me was that that awesome strip would have to be crossed.

On either side of this obstruction the water seemed relatively clear of dangerous débris, although the current boiled and cross-ripped with sickening ferocity. We headed into this clear stretch, and swung downstream, the motor turning over only fast enough to give us steerageway, for the speed of the current was as fast as it was safe for us to travel.

WE decided it would be best to drop below the crevasse before we tried to cross the river. The drift might be heading into the crevasse, and if we made the attempt from upstream, we might be carried through with it before we could get out.

Our greatest danger lay in a propeller-blade striking a log, but in addition to that danger, I feared our engine might stall. A clogging of the cooling system by leaves or other débris, thus causing the engine to heat, could easily cause it to stall. At best it was a temperamental engine, prone to quit at the most inopportune times. But I had confidence that if anyone could keep it turning over, that person was Benson.

Soon we heard the roar of the river as it cascaded through the crevasses. And then as we rounded a bend the entire scene was spread before our eyes.

The levee had broken in two places, leaving a strip about one hundred and fifty feet long between the two crevasses. On this strip were huddled about fifty

men, women and children, a few hogs and chickens, and a small assortment of household belongings, bundles and bedding. The upstream crevasse was already about three hundred feet wide, the lower one somewhat narrower. The force of the current was rapidly eating away the island on which the refugees were huddled. To get in to them, we must tool the boat in between the currents of the two crevasses in such manner that it could not be caught in the pull of either of them. If we were caught in one of those vicious currents, nothing could have prevented us from being swept through to our death. And our boat was the only means by which they could possibly be rescued.

THE time had come to attempt to cross the drift. Colby now swung the boat around, nose upstream, and Benson maintained a speed equal to the current. Quartering her slightly, Colby eased her toward the serpentine ribbon of débris in the channel. Some of this débris detached from the main ribbon above the upper crevasse, but the main ribbon, because of the bend of the river, went sweeping by, not yet quite close enough to the crevasses to be greatly affected. I secured a pike-pole and braced myself in the bow to ward off logs. A broken propeller-key, a stalled engine now might mean the deaths of ourselves and those dependent on us for rescue.

Colby was taut as a fiddlestring. He crouched over the wheel, his eyes glued on the mass of whipping débris. He nudged her nose into it; and as he did so, Benson threw out the clutch, letting the boat fall into the speed of the drift. And then Benson literally began to nudge her through it. As Colby kept her slightly quartering, Benson manipulated the clutch. A nudge from the propeller, and we made a foot sidewise; another nudge, another foot. Logs rumbled under our keel, bumped against the sides of the hull, and still we kept nudging farther into the tangled mass, but meanwhile drifting farther downstream with it. We had very little forward speed, just enough for steerage-way.

Ten feet ahead of me a log upended, caught in the vortex of a whirlpool, then suddenly shot down vertically from sight as if snatched under by a giant hand. A moment later it shot to the surface, raking our port quarter, but doing no important damage. It was miraculous how those men manipulated the boat.

Now we were below the lower crevasse. Colby rang for full speed, and the water surged against our bows as we forged slowly upstream, hugging closely as possible to the drift, to avoid the pull from the crevasse. Even as we strained upstream opposite the crevasse, the side-tug of the current was alarmingly felt. And the farther up we went, the more pronounced it became. The stern began to swing very slowly toward the cataract, so that we began to quarter upstream, with her nose as close to the line of drift as Colby could hold it. And then my heart seemed to turn a somersault. A wisp of steam rose from the pump discharge of the cooling system, warning of a plugged pump-line. It was as I had feared: débris had plugged the water-strainer. Then came the telltale *ping* of an overheating motor. The tempo slowed perceptibly. Slowly we began to leave the drift, being drawn backward by the inexorable grip of the current toward the brink of the cataract. I scrambled frantically for the engine-room and met Benson dashing out with a bucket in his hand. He rammed it at me.

"Water!" he gasped. "Quick! For God's sake."

Though the current nearly jerked my arm from its socket, I had a bucket of water back to Benson in quick time. Smart fellow! He had disconnected the intake pipe-line at a union. Seizing the bucket, he thrust it under the end of the pipe, and immediately the pump began to suck the cold water into the circulating system. I grabbed another bucket and ran for more, returned and poured it into Benson's bucket. Out for another. We were now in a straight line with the crevasse current, and moving—*backward!* In again.... The *ping* lessened. The tempo picked up, settled into its high speed roar. We began to pull away from the boiling cataract. We would make it! Had it not been for Benson's quick work and quicker thinking, I should not now be here to tell about it.

Soon we drew above the upper line of the current rip. I took the bucket from Benson and motioned him to his controls. Colby rang for slow speed. I dropped the bucket, dashed to the bow, heaved a line ashore which was caught by many eager hands, and we were there.

AS I jumped out on the levee, the scene was truly terrifying. At either end of the short strip, the red water in a monotonous thundering roar boiled through

the crevasses to the flats below. I looked down upon the roof of a cottage a few hundred feet back. The water was already above the tops of the windows. Just then a five-foot section of our vanishing levee sloughed off and disappeared. Since we had first seen the strip we were now on, at least thirty feet of it had washed away. Most certainly there was no time to lose if we were to get off safely.

Just how many people were there, I do not know to this day. I think about fifty. On the cabin wall of the boat there was a brass plate of specifications. The top line read: *"CAPACITY—25 persons."* I thought grimly of this as we began to help the refugees aboard. When they were all loaded, the boat was so low in the stern that there did not appear more than six inches of freeboard. The passengers were crowded so tightly in the stern cockpit they could scarcely move.

While Colby and I were arranging the passengers, Benson had connected the pump-line and had then gone overside on a line and cleared the trash away from the intake water strainer. But as a precaution we filled the three buckets that were on board with water, and put them beside the motor.

OUR strip of levee was now hardly one hundred feet long. Both above us and below us roared a swirling cataract that would sweep us all into eternity in a few moments, should it ever get us in its grip. Our only chance of getting out was to move quarteringly, holding an angle of about forty-five degrees upstream from the levee. A little too far either up or down, and we would be sucked into a crevasse, like a cork; where we were lying, between the two crevasses, there was practically no current at all, but away from the levee it would be different.

Colby got aboard and into the pilothouse, while I held the boat. He calmly looked all round, quietly cautioned the passengers to make no movement whatever, once we started, pulled the signal rope, nodded to me, and as I jumped aboard, we started off.

In a few moments we were in the grip of the current, and Benson gave her all she had. I could feel the bow wrenching this way, then that. Colby was manipulating the wheel coolly, but tense and responsive to every rip from the current. As we crept outward, moving crabwise, we gradually lost our headway. A few feet back of us we could see the water as it sloped to meet the rushing current of the lower crevasse. Colby straightened her, but still we seemed to stand still. I saw another big section of the levee strip cave in. That strip of levee was our only bulwark against the converging currents. If that strip became too short, these converging lines of current would meet and we would be trapped within the triangle. If the strip of levee should wash out, there would be no converging lines. There would be one cataract, and we would be gone.

I lined a sight on two trees to see if we were moving. Were we inching ahead, or was I so desperately hoping that it was only imagination? Benson was taut at his engine, but he could give her no more. Then Colby, taking a long chance, slipped her sidewise and slightly back to the edge of a swirling whirlpool. The boat gave a sickening lurch and shipped water into the after cockpit, to the terror of our passengers, but she forged ahead a little. It was this little headway that saved us. Slowly, grimly, she began to forge ahead, straining, like a horse in harness. And then she seemed to shake herself clear. The motor accelerated suddenly, and we went chugging toward the line of drift. Colby fought the eddies and whirls to the edge of it, then rammed her nose deeply into it. He kept forging ahead till the stern was nearly in, then rang for slow, and ler her ride with the drift till we were below the lower crevasse.

It was a repetition of the former process in recrossing the drift. Our pump-line plugged again, but after we were clear of the drift, Colby nosed us into the lee of some trees, and we hung on there till we cleaned the strainer again. Then it was merely a slow grind against the current, back to the landing.

TO my knowledge, I have never seen nor spoken to one of those people we saved since that time. They were all French. Many of them spoke no English. Undoubtedly they were properly grateful for what we had done, though we had to assume this, since none of them stayed there long enough to tell us so. Where they went may be indicated by a question asked of me just as we were drawing into the landing:

An old, old lady, speaking only broken English, tugged at my sleeve, and looking plaintively into my face, she asked:

"Meestaire, you know? You can tell me, maybe, where leeves this Meestaire Red Cross?"

TWO SHORT NOVELS

PORT *of* LITTLE SHIPS

By ANDREW S. WOOD

A little English seaport in war-time
—and a mysterious crime

The MURDER *of the* SEA LIONESS

By THOMAS DUNCAN

Midwest America—and an exceptionally interesting detective story

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

Illustrated by Cleveland Woodward

"You're worrying," said Beth. "About Jim Cole. I suppose. . . . He's quite straight, isn't he, Daddy?"

PORT OF LITTLE SHIPS

By ANDREW WOOD

Who wrote "Comrades of Chaos" and "Submarine Treasure."

IN a nor'-easter, the spray was always blown against the windows of the Little Shipyard House with a sound like small-shot from the particles of sand and shingle. Ever since childhood Beth had liked to creep onto the window-seat and gaze through the trickling glass at the big waves as they combed along the stone pier, hiding it for seconds but never shaking it one inch. Even now, when she was a grown woman who had lived all her summers and winters in the old house, and had seen half a hundred ships launched down the slipways into the gray North Sea, she still did it. This morning, with the spring tide at full, the little pier was all but submerged, yet as stubborn as ever.

"The *Happy Boy* ought to be in on this tide, oughtn't she?" her father said.

He didn't stand by the window with her, but sat in the armchair by the fire. He was thinking of other things. But at the back of his mind, every ship he had built in the last thirty years, trawler, drifter or coble, he considered his own child, even in these days when the Little Shipyard at Saltness was almost derelict and forgotten.

"She ought to be," Beth agreed.

Tides had not very much to do with it, now, Beth knew. It wasn't easy to forget the last time the lifeboat had come in from a mined Norwegian tramper that would never ride any tide again, the doctors and the ambulances on the quay and the maimed men who waved as they drove away, and the others who lay still. The acrid reek of the explosion had drifted ashore, hours afterward. It made her, for the first time in her life, fear that she might almost grow to hate the sea.

A moment's glint of ragged sunshine that came through the blurred glass made Beth Garside's hair look even glossier than it was. Strangers said that blue Scandinavian eyes, with such night-black hair were unusual; but they were not on that coast, where centuries before, Vikings and Spaniards had landed. The Garsides had lived at Saltness since Domesday Book. Sometimes they were fishermen and sometimes they were boat-builders. But the salt was never out of their nostrils. Their women were the women of the North Sea.

"You're worrying," said Beth. "And it's not about the *Happy Boy*. It's about Big Jim Cole, I suppose. I don't see why you should. He'll bring money into the business, even if he is a bit of a coarse brute."

Enoch Garside's face was unlined and almost childlike. Too childlike of late, perhaps. Not long ago, even at sixty, he had been a limber and upstanding man with no fault beyond a quick temper; but he had, as they put it in Saltness, "gone away" since then. Down by Fisherman's Row and Metcalf's Cottages, where they kept a divining shell on the mantelpiece, and a grandmother or two who could go into second-sight, the reason was well-known. A "weird" had fallen upon Garside-built ships, for four of them had come to a bad end in the same month of war. The others brought back their men safe—or some of them did. But if there was a mine to run upon, or a Jerry plane to come across, a Garside ship caught it. It was only natural, then, that the curse should reach to the man who built them. In other little ports on the North Sea they believed in such things.

"Better not let Big Jim hear you say that, lass. *He* calls himself one of nature's gentlemen. Yes, he'll bring money, all right. When there's a war on, men like Jim Cole have plenty enough of that.

He'll make the Little Yard what it never was before—a big one! Freighters and tankers stamped out of iron-plates in two months. All Saltness clocking-in at Garsides."

"I'll believe that when I see it," said Beth.

They were not demonstrative, either of them, and they only smiled at each other. Beth was the last of the Garside women, so that she was something more than Enoch Garside's daughter. . . . From the near-by Yard, the sound of busy hammers came, as the wind hung a little. Garsides with fifty craftsmen, some as old as Enoch himself, made almost the last of the wooden drifters. Squat and sturdy and ready for service, the latest, the *Laughing Boy*, lay in the fitting-out basin outside, standing high against the roofs and chimneys of the old town.

"He's quite straight, isn't he, Daddy?"

"Cole? Straight enough, but hard. Hold your hush about him now, Beth. He's all right."

"You haven't shown me the partnership papers yet."

"You're an obstinate woman," he said. "I don't know where you get it from. I'll show you them, soon."

He sat in his armchair, frowning into the fire that flickered through the cozy old-fashioned room and onto the dark-paneled walls. Here and there the flames lit up an old pistol or two, a seaman's sheath-knife, a steel marlinspike, where they were carefully hung. Ancestral weapons all of them, for the Garsides had been man-o'-war's men and smugglers and such in their day, before Beth's grandfather had bought—stolen and swindled, some said—the Little Yard from the Shannons, who owned it in those times.

Without knowing it, Beth herself was frowning at her father, wondering, because she knew he was hiding something from her. He was no business man. He was a craftsman, a builder of ships. . . . But at the sound of a husky siren that blew above the steady roar of the sea, she turned to the window quickly.

ALWAYS when she saw that sight in these days, something near to tears came into her eyes. From under the brow of the steel-blue sky, the *Happy Boy* came dipping into harbor. But very slowly—the color left Beth's cheeks as she saw how slowly. The scud hid the drifter, and then she was clear again in the harbor-mouth, limping, dejected; at half-mast her flag flew out stiff in the wind. Her boat hung smashed and crumpled from its davits; she edged slowly into the quay with a bullet-spattered funnel that leaked smoke, and the glass of her wheelhouse was shattered. Somewhere out where she came from, destruction had breathed very close to the *Happy Boy*.

Beth Garside stood straight and still at the window as the people of Saltness began to appear on the quay with the quick scent for disaster of all seagoing folk. The *Happy Boy* leaned exhausted there. Presently a man came ashore with a roughly bandaged arm. Manny Shannon, master, that was. The window blurred again with spray as Beth watched. But after a while she saw the three Shannons striding together in their sea-boots along the wet cobbles. Manny, the father—Tim and David, the two sons. So David was safe. It was not for him that tattered flag flew.

BETH stirred, to find her father standing beside her.

"So she's in," he said. "And a good bit damaged."

"Yes. The brutes have machine-gunned her." A tigerish rage ran through her and then away again. "Somebody's killed. It must be one of the hands, because the Shannons are all there, safe—"

"Maybe there's something in that idea, Beth," said Enoch Garside.

"What idea?"

He tried to smile, but it was a wretched attempt.

"The hoodoo. She was built in the Yard."

"I'd like to shake you, Father," Beth breathed; then: "I'm going down to the Shannons. I must, you know."

He nodded, strangely quiet. "Did I say you mustn't?"

She waited a little before putting on her oilsilk and stepping out into Vennel's Sluice, the long, narrow street which ran up behind the Yard House to Fisherman's Row. The blustering wind blew behind her straight back as she went up. Odd memories came to her as she went. When she was twelve, she had had her first fight with David Shannon in Vennel's Sluice, and she remembered yet her novel rage when he stood quietly up against the wall and let her batter him to her heart's content. There was that time, too, when she found him among the timber of the Yard, carving a model of one of the new cobles. She had ordered him out, like an outraged queen. But that was all long ago. She had tried

to be friends since then. Tried to be. . . . She went through the little garden of the Shannons' cottage, knocked at the green door and stepped inside as soon as it was opened by David Shannon.

"What happened?" Beth demanded.

Silence stayed in the little room, with its china dogs, its polished range, its bare, scrubbed table. It seemed full of Shannons, all gazing at her quietly: A father, two sons and a mother. In his jersey and sea-boots, David stood back against the light of the little window, a glint of sea-salt in his dark, reddish hair. He was the only one who spoke. He was really the only one Beth saw.

"Sit down, Miss Garside. A Heinkel plane came down on us at daybreak, when we had our nets out, on the Dogger. He gunned us pretty hard, but a Coast Patrol chased him off. They got him too, I think."

"Who was—killed?"

"Little Jack Crow. Galley-boy. He wouldn't stay under cover."

"Put his tongue out at them, he did," rumbled Manny Shannon softly. "Impudent little limb, he always was. Fritz wouldn't stand for that. Not from a boy."

"Annie Crow's boy, you know," said Alison Shannon, David's mother, turning her face from the fire to look at Beth. "It's queer how it always hits those least able to stand it."

"Yes," said Beth; then: "I'll go up and see her."

"I wouldn't," said Alison Shannon.

IF David saw Beth's lip quiver, he gave no sign of it. He was cool and civil and nothing else, though his eyes were exhausted and iron-hard from what he had recently passed through. Beth guessed his thoughts. She was a Garside, and he was a Shannon; and they were more or less enemies because, ever since boyhood, he had been taught that the Shannons ought to have been in the Yard House and the Garsides in the little cottage in Vennel's Sluice. There was hardly any bitterness in it, certainly no envy of her better fortune. It just was so. It was an old story.

"Is the drifter much damaged, David? I suppose she'll have to lay up. The *Laughing Boy*'s practically ready for sea now, if you'd like her. I came to tell you."

At her words Alison Shannon, David's mother, who had gone on with her work, turned from the red-and-white tablecloth she was carefully spreading. Tall and gaunt, but still handsome in the way of the moorland women who came from inland, she looked at Beth with a touch of cold passion, though she spoke quietly.

"It's nice, you sitting there and talking about my men going to sea again before they're scarcely ashore, Miss Garside! I know fine that *Laughing Boy* belongs to Big Jim Cole, but she's Garside-built. There's ill-luck on her. Call me ignorant and superstitious, but my men won't sail in any other Garside boat if I can help it."

"That's foolish," said Beth, trying to keep her lip steady.

"I know it is. But in these days a lot of sensible people turn foolish."

"Mother's a bit shaken," said David Shannon.

They wanted her to go, Beth could see. They had no use for her, because she too was Garside-built. Up till then, they had sailed in Garside boats because the sea called to them, because it was their living, and in their blood. Manny Shannon, David's father, his injured arm in a sling, was rising with rough courtesy to his feet. He had a head like a lion, a finer head than Enoch Garside, fisherman that he was; and no doubt he would have made just as good a master of the Little Yard. Beth opened the door and looked David Shannon steadily in the eyes, as though they were alone.

"Your mother's wrong," she said earnestly. "You're all wrong to keep up the old quarrel in these days. It'll be bad for the lot of us. Nobody can afford to keep up old quarrels, when—" The

words stuck as she thought of little Jack Crow, who had put his tongue out at herself a hundred times. "When things like this are happening! Do you believe in what your mother says about the luck of the Garside boats?"

She tried to smile, tried to send her youth out to his. He smiled back, very faintly. He said:

"Are you going up to see Annie Crow?"

"Ought I to?" she asked a little dispiritedly.

"No," he said.

OUTSIDE, she walked with her head held stiffly against the wind. She was not imaginative, but there seemed to be a menace in the bleak weather, a sneer at herself for trying to make friends with the Shannons, for wishing to extend cheap sympathy with the little shrill-voiced termagant who was Jack Crow's mother. . . . But it wasn't cheap sympathy; it was something that burst her heart. . . . There was a little knot of Yard men on the quay, by the *Happy Boy*, a Coast Patrol officer, and Sowerby, the police sergeant, controlling the spectators. Her father wasn't among them. He would keep away from such a sight. A great flying-boat, cruising low against the tattered sky, shot overhead and out to sea. It might have been a Heinkel, for all Beth knew. She took no notice, because that was part of everyday life on the North Sea. The women had to have nerve as well as the men.

She battled round the windy corner and entered the Little Yard, where the hammers were ringing. Old Jabez, the foreman, came out of the timber-shed, rubbing his bald pate with his apron. He jerked his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the *Happy Boy*. "Queer, isn't it, Miss Beth? We'll have to break a bottle of champagne on the next, to change the luck," he said.

Jack o' Lantern, the big black cat, was curled up on Beth's chair in the office. Sometimes he found his way there through the door which connected with the house. Beth smiled faintly as she lifted him down. There were not many women in the boat-building business, even when it was only a few humble cobles and drifters. The young Commander from the Admiralty, who had come about some contract for wooden ships because they sailed unharmed over the magnetic mines, had been very polite and interested. But the Garsides never heard any more about the contract.

Presently the telephone rang. The drawling but eager voice, very English, very Oxford, contrasted oddly with the lash of the wind about the Yard House, and the rough smell of pitch and timber and seaweed.

"That you, Beth? This is the Gestapo, making inquiries. Listen, darling, what's all this about Sir James Cole, Bart., forming a new company to take over the Little Yard, the little ships and the little port of Saltness? He was here today larger than life, putting the proposition before me. Rich young sucker, you know." Gerald Martin's grin was easily imagined, because he considered himself far from being a sucker. "Not that it wasn't tempting. Your father's out of it, he said. That's not true, Beth?"

"Of course not," she said, with a catch in her breath.

"I'd like to talk it over with you, Beth. It sounds a bit ominous."

"Thanks, Gerald," she said. "I'm always here."

SHE pictured his disconcerted frown. He hated the North Sea in wartime: and Martinshawe, the country residence of Lady Martin, his mother, was tucked away ten miles inland among the hunting country where the Martins were the wealthiest landowners for miles around. There, when he was not in London, he bred horses for the Army. Saltness, which was harsh in its judgments, grinned at that. It enjoyed the story that when a German reconnaissance Dornier had swooped over Martinshawe a few days before, he spent most of the day with a brandy decanter among his valuable hunters in their bomb-proof shelter.

"I wish you'd come out where it's comfortable and stay a few days, you obstinate woman," he said. "My mother's crazy about you. . . . Anyhow, I'll be along, soon. Ask your father about Sir James, Bart."

She promised to do that, and replaced the receiver. . . . Sometimes, at this hour, Enoch Garside dozed in his armchair; but when she passed through into the house, he was sitting at the table by the window, with his back to her, and didn't hear her. He stared out at the yard and the sheds, the brand-new *Laughing Boy* and the old bullet-riddled drifter at the quay. Beth saw what lay on the table under his hand. He took a great pride in the little armory on the wall, and often took it down from its leather panels to oil and polish and keep it spick and

span. He must have been seated like that for a long time. Reaching over his shoulder, Beth gently lifted the old Spithead pistol out of his fingers.

"She's loaded," he said with a half-smile. "And in good trim, too. She only needs a bit of powder to do as well as ever."

Beth shook out the heavy bullet and slipped it into her palm. She too smiled, though it was hard to manage.

"Don't you try it," she said. "It would bring the lifeboat out, not to speak of the Spitfires from the airdrome."

When she had hung it back on the panel, she went back to him. His arm went about her and hugged her tight; he was like a child caught in mischief and trying to atone for it. But a moment later he came to his big spare height. He said nothing about the Shannons, but he sent a quick glance out to the *Laughing Boy*. Not until dusk would he go out to look at her.

"You've been very secret about Big Jim Cole, Father."

His hand dropped to his side. He surrendered.

"Like an old fool, Beth. . . . Though I knew I couldn't keep it from you. There's no partnership, lass. The old place is his, lock, stock and barrel, if I can't find the money to pay him off. Him and his syndicate! Aye, he swindled me, or perhaps I was only a bit too slow. I was just taking a look at that pistol and thinking—well, I'd like to put a bullet into the man's dirty brain, or else into my own. Only thinking, you know. It's over now."

DAVID SHANNON, mate of the *Happy Boy*, had no belief in the ill-luck of the Garside boats, even though disaster had come to five of them in one swift month. The explanation, to him, was grimly simple as he leaned against the old harbor-wall and listened to a sullen boom of depth-charges out at sea, where the smoke of a passing convoy lay far down on the horizon, and the escorting destroyers darted after their lurking prey. Not that he felt any the more friendly toward the Garsides, father and daughter. A thing bred in the bone lasted for good, he supposed.

David moved his lithe shoulders and grinned sourly at himself as he realized that he wanted to be at sea again. But the bullet-wound in Manny's arm had festered, and the *Happy Boy* was in dry-dock for a month. Beyond that, his mother was dead set against her men sailing again in a Garside boat.

"Hullo!" he said now, to the girl who came and sat on the bollard by his side.

ROSE TRASK was dressed in black. She was pale for a coastwise woman, and plain, save for her gray, slanting eyes; yet men had always been attracted to her. Out of them—Luke Bibby, of the *Gladsome Boy*—had won her, but had not held her for long. Three weeks before, Luke Bibby, in a small boat, had quietly drifted ashore under the cliffs of Saltness Point, his frozen hand still gripping one oar. Rose had bought her engagement ring and her mourning at the same time, out of the savings Luke left her.

"Big Jim Cole's here with everything except the town band playing him in," Rose said. "Have you seen him? He about owns Saltness now, I should say, and he looks it."

David's jaw squared ominously, then he laughed.

"If I had my way, I'd issue clogs to everybody and make sure he was well kicked out," he said. "With the town band playing him! They'd be glad to."

The girl sent him a quick, rather sidelong glance.

"You could do it yourself," she said. "Though he's big enough. But he's rolling in money. He's Sir James Cole. I know him a bit." She shrugged. "He can do what he likes, with anybody, he thinks. Luke had it laid up for him. But Luke's gone."

David did not ask her meaning. He knew it, perhaps because he didn't know Rose Trask. He felt a protective sort of care for the girl. Luke's last words, with that funny twisted grin of his, had been: "Keep an eye on Rose when you're ashore and I'm not, Davy." Big Jim, he knew, fancied himself as an amateur sort of *Don Juan*. There was nothing of the aloof English baronet about the new-rich Sir James Cole, that way.

"Saltness won't be the same without Fisherman's Row," Rose said.

"I don't know what you mean," said David, slowly.

The girl's eyes widened. "He's going to pull it all down. Hasn't your mother had her notice?"

He took it in quietly. He had taken that Heinkel in quietly when it came down on the *Happy Boy* out of the dawn, though conscious at the time of a berserk rage deep inside of him, a wild

anger that he could do nothing against the brute in the gun-turret. Rose was looking away from him a little nervously, and then he became aware that a long limousine lurched along the cobbles of the harbor, past the knots of longshoremen who watched it phlegmatically. It stopped, and Sir James Cole with three other men stepped out. The aroma of good cigars mingled with the herring and salt-sea smell of the Saltness air, and Sir James Cole spoke in resonant tones, as though for the benefit of all listeners.

"All this lousy little stuff will have to go," said Big Jim, making a Napoleonic gesture. "I've plans for a welding-yard and engineer's shop here, and two dry-docks that'll hold ten-thousand-tonners. Cranes'll go over yonder. Put the wooden ships into the furnaces for fuel, I will. Clear out all this lumber. You see."

He turned, and saw David and Rose. Perhaps he had seen them before. Six feet of vulgarian beef, Jim Cole was not a charming man to look at, though he was one of the shrewdest and most successful men in the industrial North. One time furnace-man, gambler and brilliant speculator, he had smashed his way to the top and was proud to be still just as God or the devil had made him. A man of the people! Although he was already very rich, if you couldn't make brass twice as fast in a war, what the heck was the use of war, was one of Big Jim Cole's *obiter dicta*.

"Why, Rose!"

DAVID was watching him dangerously, as Cole saw. He halted, rubbed his chin. There was a lunch which had recently cost his companions thirty shillings or so, beneath his belt. He winked at Rose. Big Jim was always ready for his joke, even in the middle of big business.

"Young Shannon, aren't you? Made a mess o' the *Happy Boy* the other day, you and your family, didn't you?"

David answered, his tone level: "No. A Heinkel bomber did that. They turn their guns on the wrong thing—sometimes."

Big Jim stepped softly forward.

"Fresh, eh? Don't like me! Well, I'll tell you something: I'm dickering for that cottage the Shannon guys were all born in—among others. I want the site. Also most of the craft in this one-eyed port are as good as mine. Including the Garside boats. Like me any better, eh?"

"Not a bit," said David.

Sir James grinned, and brought his big jowl nearer. It was his boast that he knew how to handle both the proletariat and the aristocracy, and had no illusions about either.

MEASURING with accuracy, David knocked Sir James to the cobbles. Cole was instantly on his feet—Sir James no longer, but Big Jim of the furnaces.

"Take off your greatcoat," said David, waiting. Big Jim crashed in, a better animal perhaps than Sir James Cole, as he tore the greatcoat from his back and seized David in a Northumbrian hug to squeeze him against the quay rail and batter him, bringing back a queer memory from boyhood when Beth Garside battered him much the same way in Vennel's Sluice. As he fought, he felt a grudging respect for the man who slugged at him. He was, at any rate, a clean fighter, though it was the weight of an infuriated bullock against a lighter man in perfect trim, who knew Northumbrian style from back-heel to headlock. David only wished to make a fool of him before his companions and half the crews in the harbor who had formed the ring.

A cross-buttock that Manny Shannon had taught him long ago, on the heaving deck of the old *Norseman* trawler off the Iceland Banks, did it. Big Jim fell heavily, hung on the edge of an infinitesimal space of time, then slid over into the muddy pool of the harbor.

He came out black and dripping. The roar of laughter stopped at the expression on his face. They were mistaken if they thought he could take that. Without a word he gestured his companions, entered his car and drove away.

"That's cracked it, David," came a mournful voice from the crowd. "Better pack up and sling thy hook out of the place."

Rose Trask clung to his arm. Her eyes were glistening, but somebody laughed and she instantly let go. Like a cautious little cat, David thought afterward. He elbowed a way for her through the folk, but when he looked again, she wasn't there. His heart beat with a sharp anxiety for his mother, so soon to be turned out of the cottage that held the roots of her being. She was brave enough to stand it, he knew, but he didn't mean her to stand it. He must get to Manny and Tim, to see what to do.

"Good work, Shannon! Never saw a nicer cross-buttock. What with Jerry

at sea and Jim on land, you're having an exciting time, my lad."

Another car was standing on the quay, a low red sports-car, and the fur-gloved hand of a smiling young man fell on his shoulder as he passed it. There was a hint of mingled humor and condescension in the voice. Young Mr. Gerald Martin, of Martinshawe, didn't come often to Saltness, but when he did, he still brought a mingled touch of Bond Street and the hunting country with him, in spite of the war. With a nod, David looked past him and flushed unaccountably to see that his companion was Beth Garside. She was looking at him very intently with those eyes of hers which he had known from the pebble-gray of her girlhood to their present dark blue.

"THAT won't do you much good, David," she said.

"It's done me a lot of good!"

She too had flushed faintly. It seemed to David Shannon that something happened to both of them. A strange thing. It was precious and deep, and something like the feeling which had pierced him when he picked up little Jack Crow from the deck of the *Happy Boy*, and the boy had put his arms round his neck and died with his cheek against his. He had thought then, even while the plane was coming down wickedly in another dive, that Jack's soul had lodged with his for an instant, before going on elsewhere.

"He won't forgive you for it. He's primitive. You'd better take care," said Beth, slowly.

"I guess Shannon can take care of himself, Beth," said a voice beside her.

Gerald Martin grinned and stepped fastidiously back into the car. With a novel disturbance in his blood, David saw how he turned up the collar of Beth's coat as though he owned her. His face, though good-looking enough, was not remarkable for chin. Saltness thought him sissy, and he was always nervous and out of his element whenever he came there. Lady Martin, at a meeting of the Seaman's Hospital Governors, had once emotionally revealed how her son had been born in the last war during an air-raid which took place near the Mayfair nursing-home where she lay. But many a Saltness lad who was out at sea this minute had been born like that, though not in Mayfair.

"Don't kill him, that's all," Gerald Martin said with another grin. "Even if he does mean to make a swine-pen of the place. Save it for the Heinkels, Shannon."

"He's going to take down the cottage, David?" asked Beth in a low voice.

"He just told me so."

"I'm sorry. Perhaps something will happen. I suppose Annie Crow will be turned out too. I saw her, after all. Through the window, because she won't let me in. She won't let anybody in. She just scrubs and scrubs, from morning till night."

"She used to drive Jack out of the house with her scrubbing. And her tongue."

"She doesn't say a word, now."

Martin sent a narrow and slightly ill-tempered glance at both of them, growing impatient. He whistled, stared at David, and started the car abruptly.

The winter blue of the sky was clouding over. Out at sea the Dogfish Lightship began to moan. That meant fog, and the coble fleet safe home from the air, this once at least. David relaxed his muscles with a sigh. Soldiers in the front line did that when a party came safely back, though he didn't think of it that way. He had forgotten Luke Bibby's girl, Rose Trask. He was thinking of little Jack Crow and, somehow inextricably mixed, of Beth Garside.

BEHIND heavy curtains, the room was warmly lit, and the splash of the tide among the piles of the slipway was a sleepy sound outside. Beth, coming in about nine o'clock, lit a cigarette and

curled up in a chair by the fire. She glanced at the ring on her finger without much emotion. Gerald Martin hadn't swept her off her feet, as he imagined. She had deliberately promised to marry him, at last. Big Jim Cole's lien on the Little Yard would be paid off, whatever happened to the rest of Saltness. She had got Gerald to agree to that without seeming mercenary. He was eager to do it, and considered it a shrewd piece of business on his part. For the moment, he had forgotten his dislike of the North Sea. It would be the sort of practical marriage that was common enough among the fisher-folk. Her ancestors had married that way.

Enoch Garside had gone out into the blackout, "the silly man!" old Bella the maid told her, and the night as clear as tap-water, with warships out by Nipper's Head, and like as not an air-raid alarm sooner or later—not that they gave much for that in Saltness.

"And here," announced Bella, with sudden relish, "is thunder come to see lightning. It's David Shannon. He must have watched you come home."

BETH came out of the chair with a quick breath as he entered.

"I'm glad to see you here. Terribly glad."

She stood looking at him a long time after she said that. She tried to laugh lightly to hide the tingle of sheer joy that went through her. It was only joy at the sight of a Shannon coming to the Yard House, she told herself.

"It's a funny thing to find myself here," he said gravely. "I've come about Rose Trask. Luke Bibby's girl, you know. There's a chance that I'll start on a mine-sweeper any time now. I promised to look after her. She's all alone, and Jim Cole is here. Riding high, too. I thought—well, I thought you might be willing to see she's all right. You're kind. And you're a woman, Beth."

"Rose Trask?" murmured Beth. She didn't like the slant-eyed, quiet creature. Few other women did. And if any girl could look after herself, it was Rose Trask. But if there was any man on earth who would never understand that, it was David Shannon.

"I'll see she comes to no harm, David."

David found his pulse beating heavily. They were both standing looking at each other as they had so often done in past years—but with their enmity gone. A great comradeship and something more seemed to spring between them. There was a touch of magic in it. The sea, whispering calmly in the darkness, seemed to know all about it, as it knew everything that had happened in their lives. Beth found some quick words.

"David, I want to tell you something. Gerald Martin's bought an interest in the Yard. That means the *Laughing Boy,* too, of course. Big Jim's out. The *Boy's* ready for sea, and she'll need a mate. She's a good boat. One of the best the Yard has ever built. She's not unlucky, David. That's all foolish."

He caught sight of the gleam on her finger.

"Is he—"

"Yes, I'm going to marry him. It's very recent—this afternoon. Not even Dad knows, yet. He's out, somewhere."

"I don't think much of Martin," he said slowly. "I think he's too yellow for you. Though maybe no one has the right to say that about anybody."

To Beth's own dismay, she felt tears spring into her eyes, without being able to explain them to herself. Before she could speak, there came a heavy roar over the Yard House that rocketed high and died away like a traveling shell out to sea. A fighter squadron out in the night—seaward came the crash of guns, and then, nearer, the dreary dirge of the Saltness Point air-raid siren began. A tiny chink in the heavy curtain was lit by the white flicker of searchlights. Saltness was used to it, and the cobles were safely in, and the children bedded; but the blood always chilled a little at the sound. A woman always went a little closer to a man.

"It's nothing," David said. "Naval business, I expect; but they might call the lifeboat out."

"Yes. You'd better go. Good night, David. Don't go on that mine-sweeper. Take the *Boy.*"

WHEN he had gone, Beth sat gazing quietly into the fire. She looked at her ring, smiling faintly—for she had few illusions about Gerald Martin. It was lucky she came of a stock who could do a lot with a man, Beth pondered. *Boom-boom!* That was some destroyer's anti-aircraft, out by Red Lion Shoals. She hated war, hated it when men had to go out in harmless fishing-boats to be machine-gunned by the enemy, and come back if they were lucky, only to go out again. Beth warmed her hands at the fire in a lonely way. Glancing at the

wall where her shadow was flung, she noted the space left on the leather shield by the old Spithead pistol, which she had dropped into the harbor, nights before. As she frowned at it, it seemed to her that the polished pattern on the wall was different. The short steel marlinspike her father called "Owd Nelson" was missing. No doubt he had taken it down to give it a polish, as he so often did those relics of dead and gone Garsides.

Where was he? The thud of distant guns, though fainter now, made her hate to be alone. She threw on a plaid shawl and went out by the back door quietly, lest old Bella should hear and try to stop her. It brought her out into Vennel's Sluice, black as a gully, with the searchlights crossing above it. Enoch Garside often found his way to old cronies by that route. And David Shannon must have gone home that way to the mother who loved her old cottage and hated the Garsides so much. So that Beth was not sure whether she went to look for her father or to tell Alison Shannon that she must no longer hate the Garsides because she and David were friends, though nothing more.

A MAN in a shrapnel-helmet loomed up and barred her path abruptly.

"Is that you, Miss Garside? Best get back home. There's bits of heavy stuff coming down from the pom-poms out seaward, now and then. No, miss—no farther! If you must know, there's summat happened."

"What is it?"

Beth saw flash-lamps spraying the damp cobbles. She pushed her way past Lob Lumsden, the warden, with a cool strength that hid her fear as she did so. Two men were kneeling over something there. A warden's whistle was going in the distance. It went strangely with the heavy concussions that were dying away beyond the Shoals.

"Nay, lass, it's not your father. It's Big Jim Cole—Sir James as was. His head's stove in. I found him myself. Murder in the blackout, it was—with hell poppin' out yonder. Makes it more real, though I couldn't believe it myself when I fell over him. . . . Come on, lass, best go home."

Lob Lumsden had hold of her gently to prevent her approaching too close. He was a little lumpy man with a weather-bitten face. He cleared his throat in a way he did before reading the lessons in Saltness Parish Church. The other two straightened themselves. A slow-spoken voice said in low tones:

"The police-sergeant'll be here in a minute. We oughtn't to ha' blown that whistle so soon. You're sure it was David Shannon you saw, Lob?"

"Aye. Poor lad passed me like a hare, ten minutes ago. Hiding in a doorway while I looked at Big Jim, I guess. I must have come on him just after he did it. I wish I hadn't seen him. Plunk as the siren went, I tumbled over Big Jim's body."

"Are you sure?" asked Beth.

"Sure as I stand. It went off as I put my flashlight on his face. I mind that I thought, 'That's not the siren; that's the Trump of Judgment for you, Jim Cole, and God have mercy on your soul whoever did it, for that's the only prayer you'll get in Saltness, and it'll be a job to stop 'em putting bunting out tomorrow! . . . Now you go in, Miss Garside. This isn't for women."

But Beth had already gone. She was moving through the darkness under the stars, for the searchlights were out, the "All clear" was droning its steady note. A relief near to happiness possessed her which forgot Jim Cole, though she wasn't callous. David had been with her at the moment the siren went, the moment Lob Lumsden found Jim Cole. She held his innocence in her hands, and he would have to come to the house of the Garsides again to get it. She wouldn't take it to him, to that unforgiving mother of his. Sooner or later men always had to come to the Garside women when they needed help, and she was proud enough to wait, weak enough to want him to know what she did for him.

THE fire glowed brightly in the room she stepped into, and the armchair was occupied. With a book in his hand, Enoch Garside turned about.

"All over, Beth? You're an adventurous little body. I was in myself and under cover half an hour ago."

Half an hour ago. Less than half an hour ago she had been there herself! All at once the clock on the mantelpiece seemed to tick on an ironical note, to Beth's imagination. She went near to the chair. Half an hour, a misjudgment of time, meant nothing, but why should he say it? His hand dropped on hers. His book was upside-down on his knee. She saw her own face in the old Victorian mantel mirror, and the color of it made her look beyond it, at the old

weapons on the wall. It was nothing, nothing, when men had killed each other and themselves died out at sea, that very hour. But the old marlinspike, which had been missing, was there, back on the wall again.

Beth took her glance away and sat down quietly. She felt, all at once, much more capable of tackling this thing that had happened to her, or, at least, of facing it without breakdown. Out at sea, though fading down the coast, the guns were still at it.

"I'M a bit tired, Beth," said Enoch Garside. "We'll know in the morning what's happened out yonder. It shakes you up even when you're in the house. Look at old Jack o' Lantern!"

He bent down and picked up the big black cat from the hearthrug. It was shivering with fright, and cleaning its damp paws. When Enoch Garside went out at night, Jack always waited on the window-sill to come inside with him when he returned.

"Where were you, lass?"

Beth answered: "With Gerald. Gerald Martin—at Martinshawe. I've agreed to marry him, father. I think he's coming to talk business with you soon. He wants to pay off Big Jim Cole's bond on the Yard, and come into partnership, I believe. It's pretty good news, isn't it?"

Almost with detachment she watched him. He sat and gazed at her as though she were a stranger; but he meant to tell her nothing. She realized that and, in a queer sort of way, she was thankful for it.

"You're dead beat," said Beth gently. "You'd better go to bed now. There'll be no more excitement to-night."

"Excitement!" He laughed huskily. "That's not the word for it, Beth. Not when you're old. Those guns and searchlights and the idea of those lads out yonder. It makes you feel *non compos,* like a dog on Guy Fawkes day. Takes all the oil out of your can, it does!" He pulled himself up: "Gerald Martin? That's good. We'll have to call it Martin's Yard, from now on. That'll take the hoodoo off, maybe."

His face averted, he went out of the room without any more word. No wish for her happiness, no word that he was pleased. Beth waited a little, then went to the marlinspike that hung on the wall. It was quite short enough to go under a man's coat. Quite recently, perhaps a matter of minutes before, it had been polished afresh. After a moment's hesitation she decided not to touch it. Feeling like a detective who poked a cold finger into her own heart, she went into the hall where Enoch Garside's oilskin and sou'-wester hung. Yes, they were still cold and damp.

Beth was moving away when a knock sounded at the door. For an instant it shook her calmness, artificial as that was. It must be David Shannon, perhaps with the police, to establish from her mouth that he was in her company when the siren sounded. Slowly, she unlatched the door; for Bella, the maid, was long ago in bed.

It was Rose Trask who stepped quickly inside, and leaned against the wall, as though frightened of her, as she always seemed to be of any other woman.

"Please, Miss Garside—"

"Come inside," bade Beth.

The girl dropped into a chair, her eyes lifted to Beth, but not staying there. The black armlet for Luke Bibby, on the sleeve of her mackintosh was very noticeable.

"It's late, but I had to come though I won't stay long. David Shannon said—he said you might help me if I was in any trouble. A terrible thing's happened. Big Jim Cole—"

"I know. Lob Lumsden told me about it when I went out about half an hour ago."

"Did he? He didn't tell you that I was with Big Jim Cole at the time," said Rose Trask, linking her fingers nervously. "He didn't know. Nobody does, yet. Oh, it's not as bad as it sounds—"

She smiled wryly. "He wouldn't leave me alone, and came to the house, and I had to go out with him to stop him coming inside. I thought we might meet David or somebody who could deal with him" Rose shivered. "Somebody did. I was slipping away from him in the dark in Vennel's Sluice when it happened. It was a man in oilies and sou'-wester. That was all I saw. Then I ran."

Beth asked slowly: "What are you frightened of?"

"Of it being thought that I was in it. I'm not too well-liked by some people—for some reason. Not that anybody in the town will grieve much about him; I could name a lot who'll be glad to hear the news, and so could you. But I had nothing to do with it, I hadn't really, Miss Garside! And I'm so scared I don't know what to do."

Mealy little thing, thought Beth, beneath the storm of her thoughts. Sly little thing. . . . Why had she come here? Though she sat there pale and plain and agitated, she hadn't missed one thing in the room, from the cat to the old weapons on the wall and the ring on Beth's finger. Beth answered:

"There's no need to be scared, Rose. I'd just tell the police exactly all you can,"—she paused an infinitesimal space of time,—"whether the man was young or old, or anything like that."

"I never noticed. I never noticed that at all."

The lashes fell over Rose Trask's light gray eyes as she looked sideways, then brought them back to Beth. A sigh left her.

"I'll go now, and thanks very much. I'll do what you say, Miss Garside. There won't be many people sleeping well to-night after all the excitement, will there? I sha'n't, for one. I suppose there'll be detectives down. If they try to bully me, I'll come to you for advice."

"Do, Rose," said Beth.

The girl brushed like a cat against the oilskins in the hall as she passed. Beth closed the door silently after her, and her own face was as clear of color as Rose Trask's own, when she looked into the mirror again.

"WELL, David," said Lob Lumsden, pulling at his pipe as he leaned against the quay rail, a week after the murder of the well-known financier, Sir James Cole, in Vennel's Sluice, Saltness, "she's a fine boat, Garside-built or no. If I had the offer of her, I'd jump at it like a ferret, I would. I wouldn't hang round waiting for mine-sweeper work. Better a chance of murder at sea, than all this danged business about Big Jim. I'm tired of it myself. Morbid, I call it."

LOB spat skillfully into the water between the quay and the black side of the *Laughing Boy*. He prodded his finger into his pipe-bowl and stared at it thoughtfully. Lob's face was like a blank wall with two solemn blue holes in it. Lob was one of the men who had found the body of Big Jim, David brought to mind. The little all-sorts shop by the beach where Lob's sister lived was to have been swept away in Big Jim's Napoleonic schemes. The police had grilled him well, but he knew nothing. The rest of the wardens knew nothing. Nobody in Saltness knew anything. Saltness was clannish; its men had lived together on little whaling-ships in the Arctic for years at a time, and, ever since the contraband days, Saltness had known how to keep what it knew to itself. Saltness for Saltness folk. And, if the Almighty or somebody else hadn't struck Big Jim down in the flower of his plans, there would have been no Saltness left.

"Anybody could have done it, David, that's true. There's safety in numbers. They can't hang us all. But—"

"Big Jim?" David frowned. "I'm not worrying much who did it, Lob."

Lob knocked the dottle from his pipe.

"Aye, but they're bringing someone down from Scotland Yard, I hear. A big shot. They're clever, them sort."

"Who's being morbid now?" grinned David.

He gazed at the *Laughing Boy*, then turned away abruptly. It was easy enough to feel a tough indifference to Big Jim Cole's fate, when he looked out beyond the breakers of the bar and thought of the death that lurked out there for gallant and simple men. Subconsciously, it made a murder ashore seem trivial. But, all the same, he wanted to be out there again, and so did Manny, his father, and his brother, Tim, and the hands of the *Happy Boy*. A muscle in his cheek set hard as he went up the hill. There was another reason, too. It was foolish. But he flinched against the prospect of seeing Beth Garside with Gerald Martin again.

His mother, Alison Shannon, put down her sewing and looked up quickly

as he entered the cottage. Manny and redheaded Tim were smoking quietly. They seemed to have been waiting for him. Before he could speak, Alison Shannon's hand came out to him and she gave him a letter.

"The office-boy at the Yard brought it," she said. "It's for you. You'd better read it aloud, David, if it isn't private."

It was short, and in Beth Garside's own handwriting on the Little Yard's notepaper:

Dear David—

My father is ill, and I am in charge of the Yard at the moment. Mr. Martin has come into partnership and both of us would like you and your father and brother to take over the Laughing Boy in place of the Happy Boy, with the same crew. She is ready for sea.

Beth Garside

"We'll take her," said Manny Shannon.

David was aware that they all looked at him. He had a sense of something hidden, something he had felt also with Lob Lumsden. His mother smiled with a forced cheerfulness at him. It seemed unbelievable that she, too, should agree. But she said:

"So Gerald Martin's at the Yard. Well, that makes a difference. Me and my silly superstitions, David! Take no notice of what I said that time Beth Garside came. Garside boats are fine."

Then Manny's big hand fell heartily on his shoulder. His father looked happy and relieved.

"I'll go and tell her myself, boy. I'm tired of shore. We'll all be shipshape and aboard by morning tide."

SO it was, that soon after daybreak on a clear, frosty morning the *Laughing Boy* stood ready for her maiden voyage, *thrutching* against the wooden piles of the pier in the swell that rolled in. A few of the other boats, drifters and a rusty trawler or two, hooted their good wishes. Overhead, a squadron of Spitfires dipped a salute to the little ships. The lantern of the Dogfish Light was just clear on the horizon. Far out to sea a sheet of dull lightning told of an exploded mine. A submarine, bound for its duel with death in Heligoland Bight, showed its black conning-tower awash for a moment, no more than a mile from shore. The sun rose, and the peril of night changed for the peril of day. . . .

"Get below, lad," said Manny, all at once, to David.

At the unexpected order, David swung in surprise from the wheel where he stood. He saw that Manny, with his jaw set in a hard smile, cautiously watched the bowler-hatted figure of a stranger who came without hurry along the quay toward the *Laughing Boy*. At the same time his brother Tim sprang toward the gangplank. But, though he was stout and heavily built, the newcomer was too agile. With an ungraceful but easy leap, he was aboard.

"David Shannon?" he asked cheerfully. "Inspector Buffet. Scotland Yard. Nice morning. 'They that go down to the sea in ships and do business on great waters,' etc. A fine quotation! But I'd like to have a look through your gear before you go, Mr. Shannon. It concerns the death of Sir James Cole."

THE eyes looking into David's were the color of green ice, despite their smile and their owner's rotund shape. Looking round, he saw that the hands of the *Laughing Boy*, all Saltness men, had closed in. Redheaded Tim stood with his arms hanging. Manny had a spike handy. In a flash, understanding came. The fight with Big Jim Cole, his presence in Vennel's Sluice, just as Cole had been murdered . . . He could have laughed aloud. All Saltness, no doubt, took him for Big Jim's killer, and kept its mouth shut in its dour and clannish way. And that was why the Shannons had taken an ill-starred Garside boat for no other reason than to get him clear. . . .

"All right, boys," he said. "Hold your hand there, Tim. I get it all. Have you seen Miss Garside of the Yard House, yet, Inspector?"

"I have."

"She would tell you I was with her in the Yard House when the air-raid siren went that night," said David slowly. "That's just about the time Cole's body was found, I understand,"

"Would she?" said Inspector Buffet. "Strange. But she didn't."

A momentary chill passed through David. There was something about Buffet that warned the young man not to underestimate him, in spite of his informal manner. He respected the mate of the *Laughing Boy*. But if it was certain sure that he would expiate his sins by dying out at sea before sunset, he would have held him for the slow process of justice to declare innocent or guilty.

"I'm looking for some weapon that might have killed Jim Cole—we'll leave

out his precious title, between friends," said Inspector Buffet. "Now, have you heard of such a thing as a conger-club, Shannon?"

"Like this?" asked David, reaching behind him.

Buffet took in his hand the short, heavy club which was used for killing the big conger-eels that sometimes came aboard in the drift-nets, and poised it.

"A man can carry this in his pocket."

"A man can. He sometimes does. Some of the houses in Saltness have rats."

Tim Shannon interrupted with a dangerous grin.

"Look at it closely, Mister," he said. "If there's no blood on it, we're casting off."

Simultaneously, a deep-chested bellow echoed from the siren of the *Laughing Boy*. An intelligent glance round at the knot of husky men who hemmed him in, told Inspector Buffet the situation. He had no desire to be kidnaped out to the Dogger Bank and yet ever since his flat-foot days, his second name had been bulldog.

"Listen, Shannon," he said cajolingly. "Give this trip a miss. Come ashore with me. I'm going to nail the killer of Big Jim, whoever he is, if all Saltness sits as dumb as its own lobsters. Better be on the spot and establish your innocence, rather than come back and step into the hangman's arms by mistake. Come on!"

David agreed gravely. "It sounds wise enough to me. But it'll wait. Maybe I'll come back, Mr. Buffet."

"Or you can come with us," said red-headed Tim. "You're welcome. We could do with a mascot."

UNCERTAINLY, Inspector Buffet gazed at the gangplank. The *Laughing Boy*, her screw thrashing, was moving inch by inch from the quay. He cursed the toughness of this little port and its people while he grudgingly admired it. . . . He leaped for land, just in time.

The detective, without any animosity, adjusted his bowler. He looked round at the silent crowd of people who stood on the quay. They took no notice of him. Nor did Saltness cheer as the *Laughing Boy* set out for the first and last time. Lob Lumsden suddenly revealed by Mr. Buffet's side, uncovered his gray head for a moment and lifted crow-footed blue eyes to the sky. That was all. Alison Shannon turned and walked away in proud aloofness. On the edge of the crowd, almost unnoticed, Rose Trask wrapped a fine plaid shawl about her and waved timidly. At the window of the Little Yard office, Beth Garside watched the sturdy drifter disappear into the haze round Nipper's Head. The glasses at her eyes showed David Shannon's dark copper head and lithe shoulders by the wheel. A quick shiver ran through her. She was a North Sea woman and not imaginative. But it seemed to her that the tide, lapping about the slip-way which had launched so many little ships for the Little Yard held a special whisper for her.

It sounded like ill-luck for the Little Yard and ill-luck for its little ships.

DAVID SHANNON braced himself on the wheel grating to the steady dip of the *Laughing Boy* into the northeasterly swell. Now and then she wallowed a little in the short chop, but only playfully. Dry as a bone, with her new engines beating like a contented heart, she went out into the gray-green seas.

"She'll do," said Manny Shannon, releasing his breath.

It was the first word any of the three men had spoken since Nipper's Head was dropped behind. David gave the wheel over to Tim with a faint smile at his lips.

"She's fine," he said. "And now, what about all this kidnaping?"

His father asked, filling his pipe: "Was it you who did that to Cole, David?"

"It was not."

A grave chuckle came from Manny Shannon. Otherwise his massive equanimity remained unbroken.

"We thought not. But there was no other way to make your mother agree. Big Jim was some use, after all."

Tim looked up from the minefield chart he examined.

"That detective will be waiting when we get back."

Manny Shannon said: "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof."

Sufficient for the day. Sufficient for the hour. . . The boat was swung out, rafts ready, and lifebelts to hand. The scarce-baptized *Laughing Boy* could be abandoned in five minutes. It was routine against murder. A black snow-squall blotted out the watery sun, the drifter slogged through it, pointing to the Dogger Bank where the real fish lay, as well as the steely fish that sometimes lay there in wait for convoys. Before nightfall, she was drifting with her nets

out—a mouse foraging for food under the black skirts of war, and finding it in abundance.

"She's a lucky one," said Tim, on the fourth day.

They had gone north of the Dogger, as far as the Orkneys, and were coming home with a hold full and teeming over with silver spoil. The war seemed to lull, save for gray shapes far down on the horizon. Even they were far behind now, though there was an uneasy searchlight or two.

"I'd like to ha' built her," said Manny Shannon. In the dusk of the cabin, his face was like a strong, simple Vermeer portrait. "But I like better to have her under my feet."

"She'd take a little pom-pom gun," said Saul Jones, the main hand. A pom-pom gun and a Jerry plane overhead was Saul's prayer to heaven.

David went up to the dark deck. The night was black and somehow, because there were so many stars, shiny like Beth Garside's hair. He couldn't help thinking that way, though she belonged to another man. Out at sea, the old family conflict vanished into thin air: it was something that died in the hand. He pictured stepping ashore into Mr. Buffet's arms. He trod too close to the heels of death to treat that seriously, try as he might. Beth could easily prove an alibi, if he asked her to. But who *had* killed Jim Cole?

THE straight funnel of the *Laughing Boy* pirouetted against the stars. The sea was ink, the drifter a black cat without eyes, slinking home through the night. Home. In Saltness, even in the last war, it was said that Saltness men always found their way home, dead or alive. . . . In the tiny fo'c'sle the three hands, Josh, Joe and Jacob—the three Jays they were called in Saltness because they thought they could sing but couldn't—were singing for all that. *"My eyes are dim, I cannot see, I have not brought my specs with me—"*

"Drifter, ahoy!"

The call came sharp out of the darkness. A white eye rose and fell in the white-crested trough stabbing from a low motor torpedo-boat, a sou'-westered figure stepped on a wet bridge into the gleam of it. The slender snout of a gun was visible, lashed by spray and shaken by thrumming engines. There was a drawling Oxford voice. It was like Gerald Martin's. It was also like that of the Admiral of the Fleet who had broadcast an account of the Skaggerak battle the night before. . . .

"All okay, lucky boat?"

IT was the new North Sea call from patrol to patrol. David answered it, though Manny and Tim had tumbled up instantly and the hands were on deck.

"All okay, lucky boat. Homeward bound for Saltness."

"Tough spot. We've got a girl in that port. Yorkshire through and through and then a bit more. Look out for Jerry in the sky at dawn. He likes halibut."

The m.t.b. was gone with a creamy and almost frivolous flick of her tail. David climbed up to the wheelhouse to take his trick. Three hours past midnight. Every lighthouse doused from Cape Wrath to Eddystone. The little island that claimed to own half the world, cloaked in darkness, hiding itself. But the night had a blue starlight in its bitter coldness. The *Laughing Boy* plunged through it happily, with her big catch, as though she had found her way home a thousand times before.

Then something scraped lightly along the *Laughing Boy's* tarred side. Driftwood, perhaps. But it stretched their taut nerves as every unidentified sound did. Wicked fingers scrabbling on the starboard quarter and a warning shout forward as they heard it in the cabin, and then a blinding thunderous flash behind the wheelhouse. It lit the sea under the *Laughing Boy* with a translucent flame that came out and reached to high heaven, lifting the stern out of the water and sending David reeling against the glass of the wheelhouse. In the acrid reek that the wind blew about him, even as the drifter began to settle by her shattered stern, he experienced a savage anger at the floating belly that had spoiled the luck of the *Laughing Boy*. Somewhere he caught the roar of Manny's voice and knew they were getting out the boat. He reached out for the door; then realized that the wheelhouse, crushed by that giant explosion, trapped him. It tilted with devilish deliberation as the stern went under. Somewhere, muffled by the noise of hungry water, he heard his name called and answered it, to reassure them. His shoulder thrust at the jammed door, and suddenly he came out and slid down into the lashing water. He found one of the rafts that was still tethered to its stanchion; his free hand pulled at the lashing and un-

loosed it. The last thing, he caught himself cursing the *Laughing Boy* for letting down the Little Yard, as she slipped into the North Sea, taking him with her. . . .

A calendar hung over the desk in the office, and Beth tore a leaf from it on the sixth day after the *Laughing Boy* had cleared the harbor-bar. She did it with firm fingers, and then wrote in the log-book of the Yard, *"Laughing Boy two days overdue."* Gerald Martin turned his fair head and watched her do it. Nowadays, as part owner, Gerald hung a lot around the Little Yard. He liked the novelty of it, though he still hated the North Sea. The doctor had said that Enoch Garside ought to take a long holiday, but Beth knew he would never go away from his little ships. All day he sat in the Yard House with a backgammon board, childishly happy. Sometimes, when the guns went, out at sea after dark, he would lift his head to listen. But he was either content with what he had done to Big Jim Cole, or else he had no memory of whatever brainstorm had seized him that night.

"You're like some darned old skipper who sticks to his ship when there's no need, Beth," said Gerald Martin. "I wish you'd come and stay at Martinshawe with my mother for a few days. The Yard can carry on, and the old man would be safe."

Perhaps, thought Beth. But not with Inspector Buffet of Scotland Yard still in Saltness!

"Wouldn't like to see young Shannon swung off for doing Big Jim in when he gets back," said Gerald. "I'm with these queer Saltness guys that far. Gosh, what a foul day!"

The day was foul enough. Beth moved to the window and Martin thought how soft yet firm was the contour of her cheek. . . . He put his arm lightly on her shoulder. It was nearly evening and the sky, slashed with rain, was a wicked copper color. The old pier stood, contemptuously firm, among the tossing breakers.

A RINGING of the telephone behind them made them both turn. It was Martin who reached for it, and Beth who hung back. Quite still she stood, knowing by some second sight the message that was coming through to the owners of the drifter, *Laughing Boy*.

Martin spoke.

"It's bad news, Beth. From the Admiralty. The *Laughing Boy* struck a mine early this morning off the Farne

Islands. She went down in two minutes and there's no report that any of her crew were saved. An m.t.b. found wreckage, but there was no trace of anything else. . . . The relatives have been informed by telegram. That's all."

BETH sat down. She saw Martin wipe his lips with a handkerchief. This was something ugly, which he had always tried to keep away from.

"It looks as if there might be something in that ill-luck business, Beth!"

She gestured him to be quiet about that. She tried to think. She had to go out into the town, had to promise them that never again would Garside's Yard build another boat. She had loved David Shannon, as certainly as she didn't love Gerald Martin—and she had sent him to the bottom in a Garside boat!

Outwardly she kept herself calm, and began to put on her heavy tweed coat. Martin watched her with a nervous frown. There must have been something about her which kept him silent, or else he was really frightened. She touched his arm and said quietly, "Don't tell my father yet, please," and then she went out into the Yard.

But she got no further than the doorstep. Saltness had forestalled her. The gates of the Yard were opened and people came in. They gathered and grew in volume, with hardly any sound beyond the scrape of clogs and sea-boots, men in guernseys, women in plaids. Beth, as they came nearer in the dusk, couldn't see Alison Shannon among them. She would

be far too proud and bitter in her hatred for the Garsides.

"We want to see your father, Miss Garside."

"He knows nothing about this," she answered. "I know everything, I think—even what you've come here for, perhaps."

"Aye, you'll guess. You're one of us, Beth Carside."

"I am."

Their spokesman was the father of Joe, engineer of the *Laughing Boy*.

"Then you know us. Ignorant we are and ignorant we'll stay, maybe. But some of us believe Garside's ought to build no more boats. There's two on th' stocks now, and a few of us have come to burn them. Better not try to stop us."

STANDING back against the doorjamb, Beth wondered where Gerald Martin was. When she realized that he was not behind her she felt no contempt. She wanted to burn those two boats herself, wanted to say *"Get on with it, then!"* It was something deep within her, because she was one of them herself. But she really said something entirely different.

"You know what would happen," she said. "There's a war on. Boats are needed. I don't think one of you would get away from the police, though I'd never call them, whatever you did. Garside boats aren't unlucky. There's a war on, that's all." Her words almost trailed away: "You know it better than I do."

She flinched back a little then, as she saw a small, shrewish-looking woman thrusting her way through the crowd, toward her. It was Annie Crow, who had locked herself in her little house and spoken no word to anybody since little Jack Crow was carried ashore by David and Tim Shannon. Annie Crow, whose tongue everybody feared, had gone dumb behind her own doors. But now she had come forth to join the march to the Little Yard. She reached the doorstep and stepped up beside Beth.

"They don't," said Annie Crow, "they don't know there's a war on. They don't know nowt o' the kind. They haven't that much gumption."

In the sudden silence that fell at her appearance, her tongue came alive.

"Go back home, yo' poor daft fools," she said pityingly. "What do you suppose your men 'ud think of you if they could see you now? Behavin' like a lot of cracked Bolshies! Wanting to set fire to good, fine boats and blaming Garside's Yard because they were good lads and took the risk and died like men without blaming anybody, for Noah himself couldn't have built a drifter that would stand up to what *Laughing Boy* hit. There's more where those lads came from, isn't there? When one's gone, there's always another, isn't there? Well, then, they'll need boats. Aye, and what if they come back? What if they come back to Saltness?"

There was an uneasy murmur. Something about Annie's unloosed tongue gave them all an uncanny feeling.

"Alive, you daft heathen," said Annie, softly. "Not ghosts. Haven't men come in from out yonder before now?" She touched Beth and lowered her voice. "Go inside, lass. Leave 'em to me. I'll tear the eyes out of the first that goes near the stocks. But they won't do it, now they've heard a bit of commonsense."

Beth closed the door. Perhaps they would leave, or perhaps they would start their fire. She didn't know and scarcely cared. But when Gerald Martin came forward and gripped her arms she managed to smile at him and unloose herself gently. His car was at the front door. He must get back to Martinshawe early that night; his mother would need him, he said. And then his clear-skinned face looked miserable as he added:

"You're brave, Beth—you're different than me. I'm not brave and that's all there is to it. I can't stand things, I can't do things. No, don't say anything. Some day, maybe, you'll cure me."

The wind was blowing along the streets in a steady gale when he drove away into the darkness. There was no glare in the yard where the two new boats were building, and no sign of anybody. Annie Crow's withering tongue had evidently triumphed. Beth wrote in the Yard log-book, *"Laughing Boy struck a mine. Presumed lost with all hands."* Enoch Garside would sigh if he saw it in the morning, when he pottered round the office. That was all.

THE sharp crack of the lifeboat-gun awoke Beth as dawn was breaking. The sun was just struggling through a haze, the sea was still running high when she looked out. She had slept very little, because those words of Annie Crow had throbbed in her mind, a mere fragment of hope she clung to, hers being a nature which scarcely realized what defeat was. Hadn't men come in from out yonder, before now? She dressed quickly. Old Bella was up and making tea with a

clatter in the kitchen. Bella knew every item of news almost before it happened.

"It's an open boat stuck on the rocks out by Nipper's Head, poor souls," she announced. "Some think it's the *Laughing Boy* lads come home, but I don't believe it myself. God's not so good in these days."

It sent Beth out with her heart pounding to the tune of her heavy brogues as she ran down to the beach; but the boat was already out when she got there, the gathering crowd waiting silently in the gusty gale for its return. They made way for her, though she wanted to stay in the background, for all the relatives of the crew of the *Laughing Boy* were there, quiet, patient. Annie Crow had made them half-believe in miracles. A figure in a cloth cap and heavy coat was Inspector Buffet, of Scotland Yard. Beth's glance flared at him, before she turned away. To her, he was like some vulture waiting there on the off chance that his prey might come ashore. . . .

"It'll be them," someone said hoarsely. "Saltness men always find their way home."

"Hold your hush, and wait!"

BETH, in an intolerable silence that was broken only by the crash of the sullen breakers, found herself looking into Alison Shannon's face. David's mother stood by her side. It was a still, tranquil face that looked back at her. Neither said anything to the other. But when a movement of the watchers made them touch each other, Alison's hand closed over Beth's for a mere moment. Some intimate reassuring message passed between them. It unloosed something in Beth that lifted the heart in her breast and blurred her eyes. She knew then that the men must be alive.

"Here they are!"

They heard the lifeboat plugging in long before it came out of the wet haze. Men and women were waist-deep to help it in as it slid upon a lifting wave to the slipway. A woman began to sob. George Slingsby, the coxswain, standing bow, sang out gruffly:

"Put a sock in that, Joan! They're our lads and we've got 'em all. —Well, all except one."

He stepped out stiffly to the shingle and threw off his dripping sou'-wester without looking in the direction of Alison Shannon.

"It's David Shannon," he said. "He's missing. . . ."

"I'd like to come home with you," said Beth to Alison Shannon.

"I was just going to ask you to," answered David's mother.

The ambulance had gone ahead and was dropping Manny and Tim at the cottage in Vennel's Sluice, for in Saltness they liked to look after their own men when the sea gave them back, however battered. Exhausted and frost-bitten with bitter hours of exposure, but with no bones broken, the men of the *Laughing Boy*, having set their course for home, had found it, and were now on the way to their own firesides.

All except David Shannon, mate.

"Those men of mine are tough," said Alison, with a smile that startled Beth as they reached the cottage. There was a spot of color in her cheeks and her head was lifted, for all the world as though all her men had come home. Inside the door, her son Tim put his arms round her and drew her inside. For the moment, he was broken with what he had passed through, and he held her dark head tightly to him.

"I wouldn't have wanted to come back, Mother, but for you. David couldn't come. He—"

"I'm strong enough to stand whatever you have to tell me, lad," said Alison Shannon, gently.

Kettle and stewpan were on the hob, the fire roared up the chimney, hot-water bottles were laid out. She seemed to have known long before the lifeboat-gun went, and prepared for everything with the foreseeing mind of the moorland folk she belonged to.

"There's one thing I'll tell you before you start," she said. "David wasn't blown up."

Tim gulped his hot tea mechanically.

"No. Nobody was. We had a few minutes to get into the boat, but it was dark. David answered when we called his name and we thought he was with us. Then we heard the drifter go down. We could see nothing. And David wasn't there. We rowed round till daybreak. But there was nothing to be seen."

"I'VE brought Beth Garside along for a minute or two, you'll see," said Alison Shannon.

"Yes." Tim forced a weary grin. "She was a fine boat, Miss Garside."

"I brought her here because we're sure of the same thing," went on Alison, not pausing in her work at the fire. "We're sure David isn't drowned—both of us."

Tim sent her a quick glance and turned away his red head, with his face working. He went out of the room in his salt-encrusted clothes, without a word. To Beth, it was as though Alison Shannon, David's mother, had opened the door of some chamber within her which was brightly lit all the time, and she, too, seemed to know that David wasn't dead.

"What happened to him, do you think?" she breathed.

"I don't know," answered Alison Shannon. "There were rafts aboard the *Laughing Boy,* I expect."

"Yes, there were rafts."

Beth's heart sank a little. She had heard of men on rafts in a freezing midwinter and how few of them had ever been brought ashore alive. The North Sea was small and full of ships, but men floated for days, and died slowly. If Alison Shannon pinned her hopes to that, hers was a pathetic faith. She prepared to go, aware that Alison would be busy with her own two men now, and her father would be needing her. He never liked for her to be away long.

"Will you come for a walk on Nipper's Cliffs with me this afternoon, if David doesn't come?" asked Alison suddenly. "—And don't think I've turned crazy. I haven't. Not more than usual. I come from the moors, you know. We're a bit weird out there. We hate well, too. Too well, Beth Garside. We keep our men up to the scratch that way, too. But that's over now. . . . Now don't forget to call for me."

"I'll not forget," said Beth.

Inspector Buffet appeared round the corner of Vennel's Sluice as she closed the door. He smiled and saluted Beth. Once, he had smoked a cigar and drunk a whisky and soda with old Garside—and she wasn't likely to forget the little chuckle of childish cunning with which her father had told her all about it afterwards. What if Inspector Buffet was weaving a careful web round one man, while he pretended to watch the other? Beth's breath checked at the thought.

"They wouldn't—do anything to him. I don't believe he remembers anything about it, properly."

As they walked together over the bare grass of Nipper's Head, five hours after the lifeboat had brought in all the men of the *Laughing Boy* save one, David's mother had the step of a young girl. The gale had died down, the afternoon was clear, and a deceptive peace lay over the North Sea, where it stretched like steel below them. Alison Shannon glanced at the sun which struggled through the haze as though she judged the time by it. Near the steep step-path which went down from the cliff edge to the small whitewashed coastguard station in Nipper's Cove, she paused to scan the horizon. There was such a serene faith about her that a lump came into Beth's throat.

"There's nothing," she began to say. "It isn't likely—"

"It isn't clear enough to see anything coming in," said Alison. "And he might land anywhere. I know that. How is your father?"

"Not well."

"He never bore any real ill-will. Neither did Manny. None of the men did. It was a silly sort of business—" Alison, as though she were out for a walk, picked an early celandine from the side of the path they descended. As yet, they were not in full view of the coastguard house below. "I hope," she went on, "you won't let Gerald Martin carry you off inland—if you marry him."

"I won't."

BETH wondered if she ought to try to get David's mother home again. Then she saw that Alison Shannon pointed down into the cove where a small motorboat was drawn up by the breakwater on which a little knot of men stood. The sun glinted on the dark copper head of one of them, and Beth knew that David Shannon was alive. From somewhere

that seemed far away she caught Alison's laugh.

"That's strange. It shows that dreams can be a bit wrong, but I suppose you can't expect everything. The sun was up, and it was Nipper's Cove and it was afternoon, but David came in on a raft. I always dream when my men are at sea, you know, Beth Garside, and sometimes I'm partly right and partly wrong. But never altogether."

David looked up, saw them and waved. Beth felt that, if she was a wise woman, she ought to turn and go away, but Alison had her arm, and they were going down the steep path.

DAVID SHANNON, ten minutes later, stretched out his flayed hands to the big fire in the coastguard cottage. The flames lit his weathered young face and deepened it to a hard, mahogany brown. He looked, somehow, indestructible. He told nothing about that minute of terror in the wheelhouse. There was no miracle about his escape, he said. A raft had saved him after all, for he had cut one loose as the *Laughing Boy* went down, and a trawler had picked him up next morning, to set him aboard the *Dogfish* light-ship, on her way to the Dogger. Sleep and warmth had left him without any visible outward scar of his experience, though the inward memories would last until, perhaps, some further tryst with peril buried them.

"The old *Dogfish* was built by Garside's too, Beth." He turned his head and smiled. "So there's no bad luck there. Not for me."

His gaze left her only slowly and through both of them went a long thrill which neither could help. It came to fruition from their childhood, it was stronger than the death he had faced and would have to face again. It could never come to anything, but it was there, and nothing could destroy it. It passed into the grim realities almost immediately, for Aaron Wood of the *Dogfish,* who had brought David to the coastguard cottage, finished his mug of tea and came to his feet, with a glance at the sun.

"Got to get back to meet Jerry," he said with a grin.

He had told them of a Jerry plane which came as regular as a clock just before sunset to the *Dogfish*—a new Junkers that circled her like a mad rabbit and came low enough sometimes for the fellow in her to wave before he shot off with a Hurricane on his tail. Part o' the war of nerves, Aaron reckoned and so long as old Fritz didn't change his mind and make it a real war, it didn't matter much. But what the light-ship man had really come ashore to report was that the *Dogfish* had sighted two of three floating mines rather too close to the tide that set inshore for Saltness folk to laugh about, though, so far they had always slipped safely out to sea again for the mine-sweeper to deal with. Compared with one of those things if it went off in the harbor, Aaron Wood surmised sardonically, Big Jim Cole would have treated Saltness like a gentleman.

As they went out of the cottage, Alison Shannon said, quietly:

"There's somebody waiting at the top of the cliff. One man for you, David—and another for you, Beth Garside, or so I think."

The two men were Inspector Buffet of Scotland Yard, and Gerald Martin. The one, tipping his hat, came forward genially; the other, a slight furrow between his eyes, took Beth quickly by the arm.

"Come away, Beth. I think the Inspector has some business with Shannon. We'd better clear."

Beth stood her ground.

"I think I'm in it, too, Gerald," she said simply. "If it concerns the death of Sir James Cole, Mr. Buffet, David Shannon was with me at the Yard House for at least ten minutes before the air-raid siren went, and for a few minutes after. I'm prepared to swear to it."

QUITE gently Inspector Buffet's ice-green eyes rested upon her, surveyed her, took her in. He seemed, for a moment, to be more interested in her than in David.

"I'd believe your statement without any Bible oath, Miss Garside," he said. "And it clears up a lot of things. You'll think I'm a cold-blooded guy to want to get Shannon as soon as he steps ashore after what he's been through. I knew he was here, because the coastguard telephoned me. It's their duty, and this is mine. Mr. Martin was kind enough to bring me by road in his car. And now I'd like you and David Shannon to come to my private room at the Seahorse and make your statements to me. It's more comfortable there."

"But I say, it has nothing to do with her—"

Gerald Martin began to stammer a protest. It was useless, because Inspector Buffet was already moving. David's eyes

followed his broad back with a hard grin, and felt an impulse to refuse his invitation. David's thought processes were still simple about the Cole murder. There were things in his mind, inward pictures, which made this business of finding the man who had killed Big Jim seem puerile; as though a blundering policeman walked into the blood of the trenches to arrest a man on suspicion of some trivial crime. David thought of little Jack Crow, and of the last black plunge of the *Laughing Boy* after hell had lit up under her, and could have laughed. Then he saw Beth's face and it passed through him that, though she meant to go with the detective, she was as nearly afraid of something as he could ever imagine her. He felt a slow contempt and pity for Martin because he didn't see it, too, and do something about it, beyond looking miserable and annoyed. Instead, the man only flinched as a great Sunderland flying-boat boomed overhead, on its way to the moving smoke of a convoy low down on the breast of the sea.

"IN here," Inspector Buffet was saying cheerfully, ten minutes later, throwing open the old carved door of his private room at the Seahorse.

Beth saw instantly who was there in the inglenook-seat by the fire, even before Rose Trask came quickly to her feet with a whispered "David!" It must have been an immense shock to the girl, for her lips were white and her eyes big. She had suffered. Sly and shallow as she was, Rose Trask had loved David Shannon, perhaps long before the frozen body of Luke Bibby came ashore on Saltness Point.

"They said you were drowned!" she murmured.

"He was—nearly," said Inspector Buffet. "Sit down again, Rose."

He took from a locked drawer a sheet of writing-paper. While he did so he watched both Beth and David narrowly in a mirror. They made a fine couple, those two young things, Inspector Buffet admitted to himself. If ever there was a beautiful bit of justifiable homicide it would be the killing of a crude war-profiteer like Jim Cole by a lad like this who knew what war was. But he hadn't done it. . . .

"This is the statement of Rose Trask," said Buffet. "On the night Sir James Cole was murdered she was with him in Vennel's Sluice, as near as she can judge about four minutes before the air-raid siren went off, though the guns had already started out at sea—right, Rose? She was just parting from him when a man sprang out from the shadow of the wall and felled him with some heavy instrument. She didn't see the assailant's face clearly, but it was an elderly man in an oilskin. Rose seems positive about that."

David spoke. "She may be mistaken. And I was in Vennel's Sluice about that time. There's a lot of elderly men in oilskins in Saltness. None of them had much good will toward Big Jim Cole."

Buffet nodded. "That's just it. The whole place would have taken a bash at him if it could have got away with it. But listen. Who do you say you think it was, Rose?"

"It was Beth Garside's father," said Rose Trask.

More than ever Inspector Buffet admired Beth Garside. Her look at Rose Trask was not wicked or distressed. It was calm, but it held all the difference between a woman who was big in heart and courage and the other sort. If he had hoped she would betray something, he was disappointed, though. Buffet had already learned what coastwise women could do to protect their men.

Slow-spoken still, David Shannon said:

"That's a poor lie, Rose. Though I suppose you told it to help me."

"Yes," said Rose. Her eyes glided covertly round all three of them. The girl was only clever in a stupid way, Beth told herself. Now David was back she would say anything to get into his good books again. "I saw you in Vennel's Sluice too, David. Going up to Garside's. That was only a few minutes before the air-raid siren went, too. So what Miss Garside says is true."

THE Inspector grunted. He was one of the most patient men on earth. He had to be, in this thick-skinned dump!

"You're a champion little liar, Rose. Was it Shannon you saw hit Jim Cole, then?"

"Oh, no! It was Enoch Garside."

"What with?" Beth spoke for the first time.

"I don't know. I didn't see."

"Have you any theory, Mr. Buffet?"

She could smile with faint contempt at Buffet, though inwardly she was in despair. It made tough Inspector Buffet flush a little. This confrontation wasn't what it should have been. The slippery,

pale-faced little female eel had let him down because she wanted Shannon to think she was saving him. Any defending counsel would spin her round till she faced a dozen ways at once.

Then Inspector Buffet perceived that David Shannon was tired of it and meant to go. A husky and hard-muscled young mate of a drifter, who could stand being mined or machine-gunned every time he went to sea, but who now had his arm about a girl, wasn't a person Inspector Buffet meant to obstruct, when he wished to go. Besides that, something was happening outside the Seahorse hostelry. Buffet looked out of the window and whistled softly. He saw Rose Trask whip out of the room as though mice were in her skirts, and run up the old staircase for hiding. The street outside was full of people; the old bald waiter was flapping his hands and retreating from them in dismay as they began to choke the doorway of the hotel.

DAVID and Beth walked out and a shout went up:

"Here's David! All right, boy?"

The crew of the *Laughing Boy* made a sort of bodyguard and surged around him. For once, Saltness folk were not dour. The shrill voice of Annie Crow sounded:

"Where's that besom, Rose Trask?"

"She's gone," David called quickly. "Leave her alone. I'm all right, and so is Beth Garside."

"Have out that 'tec!" called somebody.

David cuffed the man who called, and sent him scrambling. It was the rough horseplay of the harbor and the trawler-deck and a laugh went up. But they all thought he had killed Big Jim Cole, they had all come down to rescue from the police the man who had rid the place of its menace, as their ancestors would have rescued one of themselves from the excisemen. Life on that coast did not change much. Sometimes the sea took away, and sometimes it gave back, even out of the red jaws of war. Its men and women must stick together, against any enemy. He felt a tremor pass through Beth as he steered her out of the crush.

"David, I want you to come to the Yard House," she said, in a low voice. "It's very important."

"I'll come anywhere with you, Beth," he answered, as low, and then: "I'll do anything, too. Anything."

They slipped aside into one of the crooked little streets, though Saltness was content enough to go home again without breaking the windows of the Seahorse or drumming the London detective out, now that he had let their man go. From seaward, as they went, the inhuman sound came that Beth had grown to hate, even when it was harmless—the sound of an exploded mine. It made David Shannon lift his head involuntarily too, as he thought of the inward current that set in round the point and into the bay. Next day, he would suggest a boat patrol to keep a look-out for any odd grisly visitor, worse than Big Jim Cole, that might find its way in.

"Beth! What is it, Beth dear?"

"It's my father, David. We've got to talk to him."

As they stepped into the dim hall of the Yard House, they looked closely at each other, finding each other. For that moment nothing else mattered.

"Never mind him," he said almost roughly. "Not now. You're not in love with Martin! You never were."

"No. But I'm going to marry him, David."

Gently she said it, though he stood close to her, almost with a touch of menace. He drew a deep breath, and stepped back.

"Like your forbears and mine did," he said, but without bitterness. "He brings money—and I suppose your father needed it."

"Badly, David." She tried hard to smile. "If things had been different, you might have been here in the Yard House instead of me, marrying some rich woman."

"I'll not say what I want to, Beth. Not now."

"No. I know what it is. We've both to forget it. We've got to be very kind to each other now, that's all—kind to everybody—"

She faltered and turned quickly, and was glad to see Enoch Garside, standing in the doorway of his room, looking at them. He had the look of a serene old man, who had decided to withdraw himself completely from a world that was too rough for him. But he smiled at David.

"David Shannon, isn't it? This is a surprise, young man. Come inside."

YOUNG Shannon was his visitor. David had come to see old Enoch. It was easy to see that was what he thought. He smiled in pleased wonder when Beth put her arms round him and drew him to a chair. She knelt by him,

her black hair by his cheek and closed her eyes when she spoke.

"David might be charged with Big Jim Cole's murder, Father."

Her opened eyes went directly across the room to the weapons on the wall, and he saw it, though without any sign of agitation. A burr from his boyhood came into his voice as it dropped confidentially. A child would have confessed some exciting mischief he had got into, much the same way.

"Big Jim was well put out of it, but not by David, lass, as you well know. 'Owd Nelson' did it." He glanced at the marlinspike. "—Him an' th' guns. I don't mind how it happened. I don't really. I took 'Owd Nelson' out with me just on the off chance, I think. Big Jim wasn't going to get th' Little Yard if I could help it, though as it happens—" He broke off. "—Where's Gerald, Beth?"

"Somewhere about. Go on."

He rubbed his gray head.

"'Go on.' That's what that detective says when he comes to see me, but I don't. I've never mentioned 'Owd Nelson' to him. I've kept mum. He's a stranger to Saltness, isn't he? You and David are different. I'd one of my headaches that night, Beth. Gun-headache, I call it. When they began to go off and I met Big Jim I hit him. I had to . . . those lads out yonder killing each other, and Jim Cole walking about on two legs . . . I'm tired, lass, after all. I'll go to bed now, in case there's an alarm tonight. But keep it mum, David, lad."

AFTER her father had gone, Beth took down the cigarette-box from the mantel-piece, but her fingers were incapable of opening it and she put it back.

"It's only a matter of time," she said. "Inspector Buffet will get it out of him, sooner or later."

"He's ill," said David.

"He's very ill. He'll be the first Garside to be—what they call detained, during His Majesty's pleasure. And he's always been so happy here. He's built a lot of good little ships, David. They weren't all unlucky."

Her lips twisted for a second, as she held out her hand to say good-by. No more words must pass between them.

But David said:

"Buffet won't get anything out of me. You know that. Let my mother help you, Beth. She's a grand woman. She could keep any secret on earth. And perhaps—"

But he could say no more. There was no more to say. He saw the black of her hair against the window and the blue of her eyes looking after him—and then he went out into the Yard, where the saws screeched and the hammers were tapping their last busy spell before sunset on the new drifters *Gladsome Boy* and *Singing Boy*. The sea was dead calm, and made of molten silver. Above the channel, the herring-gulls were excited about something. Nowadays, the birds were nervous, and a lot of them had gone inland away from the guns. David walked slowly along the beach. He wanted to be alone, though he ought to go home. His life had not held many problems, but this was one. Not many people were about just then. After a time, he saw that his steps were taking him toward one of the half-derelict bits of the Saltness shore called the Little Breakwater.

WHEN he reached it, he sat down on the stern of a small coble which was moored there. Well enough he knew the *Lisbeth*. A faint smile passed through his strained eyes as he brought to mind that he had watched her being launched from the Garside slipway when he was no more than ten years old. . . .

It seemed to David Shannon, now, that Beth Garside had always been in his life. Even after the fierce fights of their childhood he had always wanted to do something for her, and always kept his desire a deep secret.

David went down into the little cabin of the *Lisbeth*, to have a look round. There was fuel, and the engine was good and sound. The plan formed solidly in his head and became a real practical thing, as whatever plan occurred to him always did. By morning, after sailing all night, he could throw overboard what remained of the fuel and pretend to be a castaway when he sighted the first neutral ship, Dane, Norwegian or Swede. He knew the Dutchmen were short of good sailors, and they would ask no questions. As for old Tom Berry, who had been trying to sell the *Lisbeth* for a year, he would only be too glad to get the insurance-money.

There was a stained writing-pad in the cabin and he had a pencil. A coat lying on the Little Breakwater with a note pinned to it, and the *Lisbeth* gone, would be noticed quickly enough in the morning. David started the engine so that it would be quietly warming up while he wrote:

Inspector Buffet—

This is to let you know I killed Big Jim Cole with a conger-club in Vennel's Sluice ten minutes before the air-raid siren went. I did it because he meant to turn my people and a lot of others out of their cottages and also because I thought a man like him was better out of it. Nobody save myself was concerned in it.

David Shannon.

Whoever finds this, please take it to Inspector Buffet without fail, or I'll haunt you.

He grinned faintly as he wrote the last, in case any loyal Saltness man should be tempted to tear the confession up. Inspector Buffet would have to take some notice of it. When he went out of the cabin, the sun was almost behind Saltness Point and the sea was full of silvery streaks caused by the evening tide. David shaded his eyes to look out over the glistening bay to the just-visible lantern of the *Dogfish*. As he did so he saw something round and black that bobbed quietly on the inshore tide less than a mile out, with half a dozen gulls hovering above it. Now and then it vanished only to appear again, fat-bellied and shining.

He was still gazing when he heard a voice behind him.

"I say, Shannon!"

IT was Gerald Martin. He came forward, stiff and sullen, an unhappy young man with his debonair manner gone and injured animosity written all over him.

"It's me," said David.

"It's about—Miss Garside. I'd like you to keep away from her in the future. You know, as man to man."

David watched him gravely, without reply, as he stepped aboard and sat down, ill-tempered and on his dignity, yet not quite sure what else to say. Martin heard the thud of the *Lisbeth's* engine for the first time and started nervously.

"All right," said David. "I'll not take you out to sea against your will. Will you do me a favor, and give Inspector Buffet this note?"

Martin stared. "Where are you going?"

A grim impulse came upon David. He had called Martin yellow to Beth, and he was, but he had never seen the man's cowardice brought to the surface. He felt entitled to do so once, before he left him for Beth to make a better man out of. He took Martin by the shoulder and pointed to the inward-running tide, to the almost jovial-looking object that bobbed there.

"That's a mine. What they call a murder-mine. Laid by a plane out of Heligoland. It's due to hit Saltness Harbor in about a quarter of an hour or so if it goes on. There won't be a lot of the harbor left. I'm going out to see if I can lasso it and tow it out again. There's time for you to get clear inland, Martin, if you run your hardest and climb the cliff-path."

After that he didn't look at the man again. He opened the rope-locker. Plenty of lengths of good manila there! A sensitive engine-throttle for sidling near to that bit of sudden death, and an oar to fend it off. He forgot everything else. There was no time to signal the town its peril. No sweeper was in sight, no Naval vessel. Every second was precious. He took up the ax, straightened himself to cut the moorings, and found himself looking into the color-drained face of Gerald Martin.

"Let me," said Martin. "I'm—I'm coming with you."

He snatched the ax, chopped the rope and then sat down, huddled, as David opened throttle and the *Lisbeth* chugged out from the breakwater. If ever a man was alive with utter fear which it was vain to hide, it was Gerald Martin. He took no pains to hide it. He sat and looked at the black thing in the silver sheet of water that danced ahead, and licked dry lips. For a full minute David sat statue-still at the tiller, without looking at him. He wasn't good to look at. And yet nobody had made him come.

"Steer?" David asked then laconically.

"A bit," Martin spoke through his clenched teeth. "I know these engines too. Let me do something, Shannon, for God's sake!"

David stared at him soberly. "I'll use you, presently. Sit still till I tell you."

SLOWLY the *Lisbeth* lobbed on out. Though it seemed to take an eternity, they came close enough at last to see the deadly horns of the thing as it wallowed slowly on its way into Saltness. The perverted ingenuity of man had made it as sensitive as a human heart, the mechanism within it was a cocked trigger, the explosives would have wrecked a capitol. A half-submerged rock, a piece of wreckage, might set all the heaven shaking any moment now. Its course was erratic

and, when David throttled down too much, the *Lisbeth,* too, fell into the hands of the tide. One accidental blow of her lifting forefoot would be the end. He steered in a wide circle down-current from the mine, threw the *Lisbeth* hard over, and put the tiller into Martin's shaking hand while he got ready the lasso. He had seen it done by Naval men, though they were experts. They would have to creep up within a yard or two before he could throw the slip and tighten it round the horns, and they were doing it now, creeping, second by second. . . . Even if they got it, they might lose it a dozen times and the thirteenth be the unlucky one . . . What he was afraid of, was the sudden breakdown of Martin's nerve. He had the *Lisbeth's* conger-club ready for that emergency.

"Half-throttle. Keep her steady now. We're on it."

"Look!" came Martin's voice.

David heard the sudden vicious burst of engines in the sky overhead. He guessed what it was, but didn't move.

"Look at nothing. Keep her steady, man."

The lasso dropped neatly, the big black globe wallowed past, the rope tightened slowly. It slipped, then held, looped over three of the horns. With his mouth dry, David watched the corraled mine swing on the arc and lumber toward the coble as though it would come inboard. Then he looked at it no longer. They had it, and the *Lisbeth* was slowly throbbing with it out to sea. The sound overhead broke into a high, deafening whine and looking up he saw the gaunt shape of a plane that came down, streaked a shadow over the water, and screeched up again.

"German!" said Martin, huskily.

IT was. The big new Junkers that circled the *Dogfish* like a mad rabbit every evening had come along to investigate what was happening in Saltness Bay, as David realized. The sick helplessness which he remembered feeling when the *Happy Boy* was machine-gunned seemed to bring his insides into his throat. No man on earth could help it who had experienced it before. The din and speed of the inhuman craft, a bird bigger than a drifter, did it. All at once, he heard Gerald Martin laugh, as he jumped up and made a derisive gesture. It was not hysteria. It was sheer flaming excitement that killed his fear for good. But little Jack Crow had done something like that.

"Sit down," David ordered and grinned with stiff face-muscles. "He mayn't mean to gun us. But Fritz takes offense easily. He'd let us go, if we cast off from the mine. What do you say?"

Martin grinned back at him. It was a distortion but it was genuine.

"Wouldn't give up the little beauty for anything! How far do we take it?"

The screech of the Junkers as it came down vertically in a power-dive drowned David's answer. Its purpose became clear. It was trying to make the coble let go its booty. Martin threw up his face and laughed again, though he stayed down at the sight of David's clenched fist. They saw a goggled face and a gesturing arm and crouched as the great shadow encompassed them for a split second. The oily wind of it made them cough. There was far enough to go yet. Minutes of it. The seaward current that David wanted to drop his charge into to be carried out was a full mile away. It set out from Loom Scaur and the coble, with its tow was doing no more than four knots, with throttle full open.

"Keep down," he said, quietly, then: "I'll lay you out if you move a hand, Martin. They're getting their guns to bear."

"The dirty hounds," muttered Martin.

BUT there was an enjoyment that approached ferocity on his face. He breathed like a man who had burst out of some prison. Gerald Martin of Martinshawe came athwart the eyes of danger for the first time in his life, and found them bright. The Junkers spat fire when it swooped again, spattering the water, darkening it with a deadly rain. The gunner must have been expert for he kept clear of the mine, which would have lifted his own craft into the sky and shattered it, so low did his pilot fly. Yard by slow yard, the *Lisbeth* crept to the outward current while the plane screeched up again above her. This time, David told himself, something was going to happen. Gunner and pilot had the range now and the next burst would in all likelihood riddle the *Lisbeth* like a colander, unless some stray bullet exploded the mine. He shrank as it came down and himself lifted his clenched fist in defiance to it. The world tore apart about them. There was a shower of splinters and something in his thigh that seemed to crumple the flesh with red-hot coals. The tiller flew out of his hand as he slumped. . . .

"Time for you to keep down yourself, now, Shannon, old boy," said Martin.

He scrambled to the tiller and sat at it, the natural color back in his face, and something else that had never been there before. David, with the blood soaking him and weakness creeping over him saw him look behind at his tow like a careful lighterman who thought of nothing else. A single bomb dropped wide making a creamy pother that lifted the *Lisbeth* and the mine and nearly threw them together. But it was over. An instant later the Junkers was shooting off low across the lead-colored water and, from Saltness Point, from Nipper's Head, from Loom Scaur, the Spitfires were converging on it. In Saltness the siren was wailing.

"Carry on, partner," bade David.

He dragged himself aft over the threshing propeller and took the tow-rope, lying there with his bloody leg, watching for the change in the waters, feeling a little lightheaded as he did it, seeing Beth in the water. It was dusk now, the water was hard to see, but Beth was there. He could see her as he lay there, thinking, wherever his heavy body touched the boards of the coble, that it was Garside-built, and a lucky boat—Beth's boat. Martin stayed by the tiller as a good soldier would stay by his post. His lip bled where his teeth had bit. Out by the *Dogfish,* a salvo of gunfire broke and kept on, and perhaps Aaron Wood would never see that particular mad rabbit circling again. The mine began to bob on a sidewise course. David saw it through a mist. He called weakly out to Martin to put her hard aport and threw off the rope. Yard by yard, the distance widened and the menace which was worse than Big Jim Cole went clumsily out to sea again. David watched it till blackness came over him, and Gerald Martin turned the *Lisbeth* to take David into the harbor he had never meant to see again.

ONE day in March, under a windy blue sky, the two—*Gladsome Boy* and *Singing Boy*—were launched on the same morning at the Little Yard, and the keel of *Lucky Boy* was begun in the afternoon. Saltness made a modest day of it: there was not a sound of war out to sea, and it was Alison Shannon who drove the first pile of the *Lucky Boy's* keel. The sight of bunting caused a passing plane patrol to turn and give a salute to the nativity of the little ships. Gerald Martin, by Beth's side, watched them. He was in Air Force uniform. Before long, with luck, he would be flying one of the big Sunderland flying-boats of the Coast Patrol.

"Thought I'd wait until today, Beth," he said, as they walked back into the Yard House. He lifted her finger and took his engagement-ring from it with a wry smile.

"I knew you meant to," Beth said.

Out by the pier as they stood there a siren blew and a big gray drifter that flew the white ensign came nosing slowly into harbor. The *Gladsome Boy* was to be fitted as a mine-sweeper and Skipper David Shannon was coming ashore to take over command.

"Darned funny," said Martin. "If I hadn't gone out with him that day I'd still be just—like I was. Sheer luck . . . I'll not stay. I want a word with David. Carry on with the little ships, Beth."

WHEN he had gone, Beth came from the window. The old weapons of past Garsides still shone on the wall, but "Owd Nelson" wasn't there. It was two months since Enoch Garside had quietly gone out with the tide—with Inspector Buffet by his bedside. The truth made little sensation outside Saltness. Saltness itself was realistic about such things and had no false sentiment. There were always flowers on Enoch Garside's grave, sometimes so many that they covered the inscription:

ENOCH GARSIDE
Builder of Ships

David had lost the last of his limp, Beth saw, as old Bella showed him in with a broad smile. They looked at each other for some change. There was none. Neither had changed to the other since they had battled in Vennel's Sluice, years before.

"Martin sent me here, Beth," he said.

She smiled, because she was so sure he was her man, and then he said so:

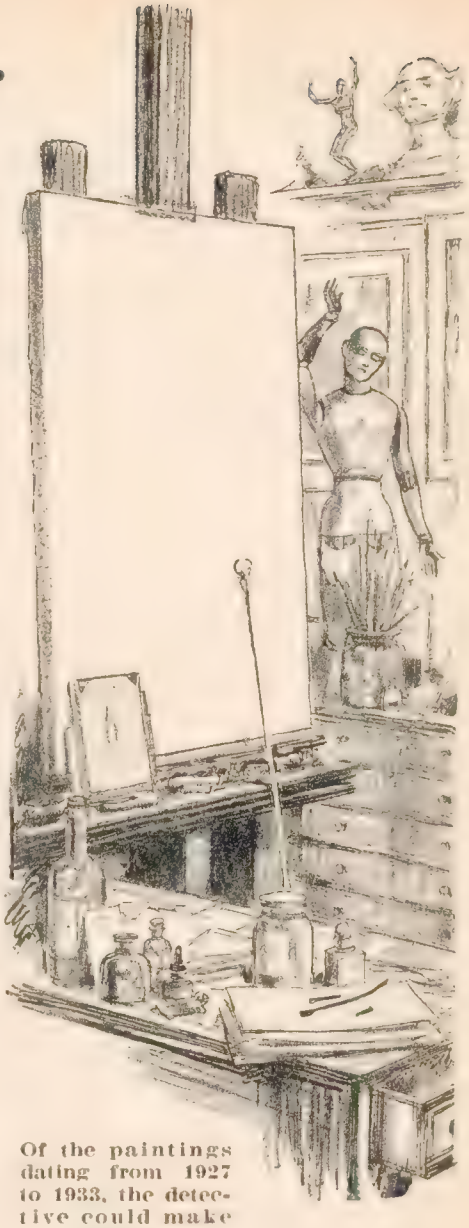
"I'm your man, Beth."

"I'm your woman, David."

The tide splashed among the piles of the slipway outside; there was the thud of mallets on the keel of the *Lucky Boy* when they stood together to look out. The North Sea was calm and the old stone pier stood in the green water, friendly and resting, but still four-square to whatever the sea might do.

THE END.

The Murder of the Sea Lioness



Of the paintings dating from 1927 to 1933, the detective could make nothing.

SOME people like nothing better than attending an art exhibit, but Detective Shep Millen was not such a person.

On that fine afternoon, when he pulled up to the curb at Woodland Park, his cold eyes regarded the Chanford Municipal Museum of Art with disfavor. And on his saturnine countenance, deep disgust was stamped.

"Damn," he sighed, switching off the motor.

Moodily he observed the debs and dowagers disembarking from limousines. Soon he'd have to follow them up the sunny walk to the bright gray building.

"You've gotta go, Shep," Inspector Dugan had declared.

"Like hell—"

"Now, just wait! It won't be so bad. They'll feed you tea and crackers—"

"I don't like tea."

"It aint my idea," Dugan confessed. "It's Breck's. An' since he's Police Commissioner, an' orders is orders—"

"But why in the name of—"

"Because this artist fellow, Deetsworth, is scared he'll be killed. It's nonsense, of course—them artists are all nuts. But he went to school with the Commissioner, an' when he said, 'I'm scared I'll be croaked,' the Commissioner said: 'Worry no more about it. I'll have the head of the Homicide Bureau there to protect you. Shep Millen, the bravest an' smartest dick—'"

"All right. Cut the kidding—I'll go," Millen had groaned. "But damned if I'll drink tea!"

Now, with a long breath, he snapped away his cigarette and strolled toward the museum. In his mid-thirties, Millen was a quick-nerved man of medium height, lean and wiry. Beneath his armpit a .38 nestled, but of course he wouldn't use that today.

Entering the museum lobby, he was instantly engulfed by fluttering femininity. Young women and old, fat women and thin—they were milling about on the marble floor, or grouped in islands. Through the wide door to the East Gallery, he could see more of them. And they were all talking.

He edged through the chatter and entered the East Gallery. Expectancy hung in the air, intensified by the dark-blue velvet draperies which masked one painting from view. Nicholas Deetsworth's other pictures hung in plain sight; but

A most unusual detective mystery by the gifted author of "My Corpse Hangs in the Barn" and "The Dance of Death."

By THOMAS DUNCAN

this one, on a large easel was to be unveiled at program-time.

Wondering why such secrecy should surround that painting, Millen fished a newspaper clipping from his pocket. It was a feature story from the society pages of the Chanford *Tribune*. So that he might understand the background of this occasion, the Police Commissioner had sent him the clipping by way of Inspector Dugan. It said in part:

> The exhibit opening Wednesday is Mr. Deetsworth's first show in two years. One

feature will be the unveiling of his latest canvas, whose subject Mr. Deetsworth refuses to disclose, but which bears the promising title, "The Murder of the Sea Lioness."

Speculation is rife as to whether this title is symbolic, marking a return to his period of cubistic influence, or whether the painting depicts the killing of an actual sea lioness by a seal-hunter. Because of Mr. Deetsworth's trend toward satirical realism, most opinion inclines toward the latter view.

A smile quirked Millen's lips. "How exciting!" he thought sarcastically.

On the countenance of Nicholas Deetsworth, staring out from the newspaper photograph, there was no smile. The artist possessed a massive head topped by an unruly shock of gray hair; and his eyes, distorted by thick glasses, looked apprehensive and visionary.

A screwball, Shep Millen thought. It wasn't surprising that a man with those wild, dreamy eyes should be tortured by the delusion that some enemy would slay him at his exhibit.

"Outrageous!" Mrs. Sylvester asserted.

POCKETING the clipping, Millen approached an official-acting man wearing nose-glasses who stood by the speaker's stand. And when Millen asked if he were Percy Reese, the museum director, he nodded.

"I'm looking for Nicholas Deetsworth," Millen said.

"He should be here now," Reese replied. "We're waiting for him. But you know the artistic temperament. Time means nothing to him. He may have decided not to come, or he might have been seized by a big idea and started working and forgotten us."

"Can't you phone him and find out?"

Reese smiled faintly. "He doesn't have a phone in his studio. It would interrupt his work. When he's working, it's impossible to reach him. He barricades himself and works for days at a stretch. He won't answer knocks and doesn't even take in his mail."

"Sounds squirrelly."

"I beg pardon?"

But before Millen could reply, Reese lost interest in him.

"There's Mr. Wormhoudt!" the director exclaimed, hurrying to the door.

The object of his enthusiastic fawning was a large man of sixty in formal daytime dress. With his silvery hair and beefy face and shrewd eyes, he looked like a cartoonist's conception of a millionaire. And that was what he was.

With a kind of burly insolence, he surveyed the gallery and people as if he owned them all. Above the starched gate of his collar, his fat jaw was lifted; his nose bristled aggressively; and he paid scarcely any heed to the director.

As Felix Wormhoudt sauntered majestically into the room, Millen noticed the man's wife. She was scarcely more than half his age, a brash little number with lots of curves and dark-red hair. The other women were regarding her with cool hostility, but she didn't seem to mind. Ignoring them, she smiled brightly at the few men present. Millen seemed to remember that she was the second Mrs. Wormhoudt.

After they had seated themselves, the museum director tripped up to the speaker's stand and rapped for attention. Shep Millen eased himself to a post outside the gallery door. His spirits were rising. His assignment here had been to guard Nicholas Deetsworth; but since the artist hadn't appeared, there was no reason why he should punish his eardrums by listening to the program.

"Unfortunately," the director was saying, "we may be denied the presence of Mr. Deetsworth this afternoon—"

Illustrated by
Orson Lowell

"Three cheers!" Millen thought.

"—but we are fortunate indeed to have with us Mr. Felix Wormhoudt, who will perhaps consent to say a few words about Mr. Deetsworth's work."

"Try to stop him from talking," Millen thought.

"Mr. Wormhoudt," the director continued, "was the first connoisseur to recognize Nicholas Deetsworth's genius. Years ago, when Mr. Deetsworth was an unknown artist struggling in dark poverty, he took one of his paintings to Mr. Wormhoudt, and that gentleman purchased it."

"What a sucker he was!" Shep Millen thought.

"For years Mr. Wormhoudt was Mr. Deetsworth's only customer. He purchased more than a score of our artist's earlier paintings. It is not too much to say that he was virtually Mr. Deetsworth's patron. Then national recognition came suddenly to Mr. Deetsworth, when four years ago he won first prize at the Kettle Gallery's Exhibit. His painting, 'Indecision of a Crow,' caused a tremendous stir in the artistic world.

"It was reproduced widely in newspapers and magazines; critics praised or denounced it; and Mr. Deetsworth found himself famous, with a lively market for his paintings. And Felix Wormhoudt, owing to his discernment, possessed a marvelous collection of paintings by one of the most famous artists of our day. It gives me great pleasure to present—"

AMID sharp applause, Felix Wormhoudt rose to speak. Millen had heard all he could stomach. He slipped along the marble corridor toward the back of the building. Out there on the

steps he would lounge in the sunshine and enjoy a cigarette.

But before reaching the back entrance, he came upon a door lettered, *"Office of the Director."* It was ajar, and inside he glimpsed a good-looking girl at a filing cabinet. With a bright smile she turned and said: "Yes?"

Millen answered her smile. "I'm looking for an ash-tray—"

"Right there." She indicated the desk. And with a twinkle in her eyes she asked: "Aren't you enjoying the program?"

Millen groaned. The director's secretary laughed.

"Sit down," she said. "I could use a cigarette myself."

BUT what began as a pleasant chat with a pretty girl proved to be the biggest mistake in Millen's career. For even as he held a match for her, a car was pulling up outside the museum. In it rode four men—men with guns.

Pete Surk, the driver, remained at the wheel of the sedan, while his companions strode to the museum. Inside the lobby the three men paused. The Dude paused first, then the other two. They heard a man finishing a speech in the East Gallery; then applause, another man's voice; then a woman's.

The Dude, always a classy dresser, was brilliantly clad in a gray fedora, a chalk-striped suit. He was a chunky man whose talcumed jowls even the keenest razor left blue. His close-set dark eyes focused for an intent moment on the East Gallery door, then swept the corridor running back from the lobby.

He waved a stubby thumb and said: "Aw right, Tappy."

Tappy was the youngest—just barely of age, but quite a guy with a rod. He had departed reform-school before graduation, to strive for a career as a night-club dancer—but not even the honky-tonks wanted him. They didn't want monkey-faced guys without chins. Girls didn't want that kind, either. Tappy bore a grudge against girls.

Tappy's thin legs took him swiftly and silently along the corridor. If anybody tried entering the back door, or if some custodian appeared, they would have to deal with Tappy. But before reaching the back door, he came upon a half-opened door that was lettered, *"Office of the Director."*

Without hesitation Tappy swerved over the threshold. A sandy-haired man was lounging there smoking, his back to the door, his hat on his knee. Before he could glance around, Tappy jabbed his automatic against the man's skull.

"You move," Tappy said, "an' I'll blow a hole in your head."

The ash was long on Shep Millen's cigarette; he had been about to flick it. But he didn't flick it now; nor did the ash tremble off. It balanced unquivering upon the cigarette-end.

"I won't move," he said.

The nerves of Susan Clay, the director's secretary, weren't so well-controlled. But she hadn't been threatened with a nice funeral as often as Shep Millen.

"Take it easy," Millen told her. "Just sit still and take it easy."

She tried; but her fingers began shaking violently, and a vein in her throat throbbed. Her face was deathly white.

"Sit still!" Millen repeated.

He was playing for time—trying to collect his thoughts. It flashed through his mind that maybe Deetsworth hadn't been such a screwball, after all. For some crazy reason this man with the whining voice must have hated Deetsworth and come here to plug him. Well, the artist had stayed away, and this fanatic would find that out. While he was searching for Deetsworth, Millen could probably get a bead on him. . . . If only the girl across the desk could take hold of herself—

She couldn't. For suddenly she scrambled to her feet and sent a scream pealing through the door.

The gun-muzzle left Millen's skull, and brilliant pain hit him. His head felt like a tree struck by lightning. Blackness whirled through the halls of his brain; and it seemed he was falling through the dark, pitching sickly end over end like a man tumbling from a plane at midnight.

"Shut up!" Tappy was snarling.

Susan Clay cried: "You hit him! You banged his head with that gun and—"

She screamed again, flung herself toward the door.

The Dude had ordered no shooting—not unless positively necessary. This would come under that, Tappy guessed. So he squeezed the automatic.

THE first shot was low, but the second one tore through the sorority-pin Susan Clay wore on the left side of her sweater, above her heart. She stopped screaming.

Tappy considered sending a bullet into the guy he had conked out. But he

Susan Clay cried: "You hit him! You banged his head with that gun and—" She flung herself toward the door. . . . Tappy squeezed the automatic.

guessed he wouldn't. Orders were orders. He could tell the Dude he had merely conked the sensible guy, strictly following orders, but that the dame had declined to be sensible.

Closing the door behind him, Tappy surveyed the corridor, saw nobody; so his long legs went skating over the slick floor toward the front of the museum.

ALL the people in the East Gallery were standing facing the walls, with their hands up. Some of them were pretty mad. Mrs. R. Campbell Sylvester was simply furious. She was a great well-corseted lady with the habit of arching her brows when something met her disapproval. Her brows were arched now.

When those persons with guns appeared at the door, Mrs. R. Campbell Sylvester had been standing before the audience, speaking. She loved to speak. People who interrupted her when she spoke were inviting trouble, as her husband had learned, to his sorrow.

"And soon we shall have the pleasure of seeing Mr. Deetsworth's latest canvas," she was saying, when the Dude and Red Gyfer entered her life. Gyfer remained in the doorway, a big scowling man with the head and shoulders of a bison. The Dude strolled toward Mrs. Sylvester.

She lifted her lorgnette; her brows shot up.

"Young man—"

"We've got you all covered," the Dude said. "From behind and in front. Everybody take it easy, and there won't be no trouble."

"Well, I must say—" began Mrs. Sylvester.

"Keep your pants on, sister," the Dude snapped.

Mrs. Sylvester gasped. "This," she declared, "is outrageous!"

"Yeah? Well, get those paws up, sister, and move!"

Still scornfully dignified, Mrs. Sylvester swept haughtily over to join the people facing the wall.

"Outrageous!" she asserted again.

The Dude turned to the easel which held Nicholas Deetsworth's latest painting. He whisked out his knife and yanked aside the dark-blue draperies. Brown paper covered the canvas, and lettered on the paper were the words: *"Do not remove this paper till the unveiling."* The Dude tore it off.

When he beheld the picture, astonishment crossed his face, and a tinge of horror. Imagine a guy painting a thing like that!

He thrust the blade into the edge of the canvas and cut it from the frame. As he rolled it into a tube, the sound of a scream echoed from the museum corridor, followed by another scream and two shots. The Dude swore between his teeth. Damn that kill-crazy Tappy!

Tappy appeared at the door, entered the gallery and started working on the

Tappy grabbed her wrist. "Listen, lady—open up— Open that fist!"

audience. The Dude trotted to the door and relieved Gyfer, who joined Tappy in looting the throng.

They worked fast, thoroughly. The wealthiest families in town were represented there that afternoon, and the pickings were rich. From the neck of Mrs. Felix Wormhoudt they removed a string of beautifully matched pearls, and her husband's wallet yielded nearly three hundred in currency. Red Gyfer spread out a cloth on the floor, and on it the heap of gems and money mounted rapidly. Then Tappy reached Mrs. R. Campbell Sylvester.

"Outrageous—simply outrageous!" she was thinking. Why didn't somebody do something? This was simply unbearable! These persons had interrupted her speech—she had missed a bridge luncheon to labor on that speech; she was nearly in tears—she was steaming mad—

A gun jabbed her back.

"Pull down your left mitt," Tappy ordered.

Mrs. Sylvester half turned. "Young—"

Tappy reached out and grabbed her left wrist, twisting it toward him. He was after the trio of diamond rings on the third finger. She clenched her fist.

"Listen, lady—open up—"

Mrs. Sylvester prized those rings. One of them Dr. Sylvester had given her when they became engaged, and the others—

"Open that fist!" Tappy repeated.

Mrs. Sylvester forgot she was a great lady. For an instant she went skipping back across a half-century to the little pigtailed girl she had been in a schoolyard, when one of the tough kids from across the tracks tried to tease her. Swiftly, her fist snapped open and slapped the young man hard.

He stepped back, his free hand lifting to his cheek, his snaky eyes glittering. Something about Mrs. Sylvester reminded him of the superintendent's wife at reform-school; she used to slap him around. Tappy's gun-hand began working. The shots exploded loudly in that marble room. . . . Three of them.

"Tappy!" the Dude barked.

Muttering, Tappy was already backing from the room. Red Gyfer covered his retreat.

"You punk!" the Dude snarled.

They didn't wait to finish cleaning the crowd. Rapidly they crossed the lobby, the Dude clutching that roll of canvas.

Pete Surk, the driver, saw them coming and snapped open the sedan doors. They jumped inside, and the sedan went streaking off fast down the street.

WHEN Shep Millen began to think again, it seemed he was lying beneath a slate-slide deep in some wrecked coal-mine. The débris had buried only his head. And his head felt as big as a wabbly balloon. Inside his skull pain

was whirling and sizzling and shooting like pinwheels and Roman candles.

He heard the buzz of voices; somebody shook his body; his eyelids cracked open.

Very near, like a movie close-up, he saw an aggressive nose where whisky-flowers blossomed. Two insolently cold eyes were scrutinizing him.

Felix Wormhoudt said: "He's all right. Or maybe he was playing 'possum."

Millen's teeth ground together. He shoved an elbow against the floor and tried to push himself up. The room was crowded with people, and with light that hurt his eyeballs.

INDICATING a young man talking excitedly into a phone, Wormhoudt said:

"Nedra says you're Millen of the Homicide Bureau. Is that right?"

Millen blinked at the young man. He remembered him faintly as Bill Nedra, a reporter for the Chanford Morning *Herald,* which Wormhoudt owned. Nedra must have been covering the exhibit—

"Yeah—I'm Millen."

Wormhoudt's thick lips curled.

"A hell of a detective you are! What do we pay taxes for?"

Millen snapped: "Oh, shut up—I want to think."

"The gentleman wants to think! That's a good one! Here, give me that phone," Wormhoudt commanded.

Millen shut his eyes; his elbow slipped from beneath him; he lay at the core of whirling pain and sickness. Through thick fog he heard Wormhoudt barking into the phone: "Get this, Charley! Play it up for everything you've got: Shep Millen of the Homicide Bureau was here during the whole business. He let 'em knock him out so they could go ahead and kill those women and rob the crowd—"

It occurred to Millen that he didn't like Felix Wormhoudt; the man's Morning *Herald* was always attacking the Commissioner and the Department. . . . But his head hurt too much just now to think about it.

He must have lost consciousness again, for when next he opened his eyes, he was gazing up at Doc Bevans, a police surgeon. The blazing brilliance of pain had burned down to embers glowing inside his head, and he was beginning to remember things. He had come to an art exhibit; he was talking to Susan Clay; a gun had prodded him—

He sat up; in the room now there were plain-clothes men, and harness bulls, and Inspector Dugan and even Police Commissioner Breck.

"What happened?"

Breck shot him a glance. "Plenty!"

"Yeah, Shep," Dugan agreed soberly, "there's been a lot—"

Breck was a lean, well-dressed man with icy gray hair. And his voice was icy too, as he told Dugan:

"I want you to demote that man. Demote him as low as the Civil Service Board will let you. Put him on a beat again—put him to directing traffic—"

Breck stalked from the room.

Millen got a knee under his body, swayed erect, like a groggy fighter.

"Take it easy, Shep," Doc Bevans said.

"What in hell happened?" Millen demanded. "I couldn't find Deetsworth. He wasn't here. Did he come? Did somebody croak the guy?"

Dugan said: "No. But two women were killed. An' three mugs stuck up the crowd, an' stole Deetsworth's painting. Felix Wormhoudt is hopping mad, an' so is everybody else."

"Are you?"

"I aint exactly tickled to death," Dugan said.

THE Morning *Herald* had an extra on the street late that afternoon, and it reached a new low, Millen thought, in mustard-colored journalism. It accused Shep Millen of stupidity, cowardice, bungling, and indeed everything except murdering Susan Clay and the wife of Dr. R. Campbell Sylvester.

It declared that a special recall election should be held to oust Commissioner Breck. It hinted that Inspector of Detectives Dugan had always enjoyed brain-power just one degree weaker than a gnat's. Chief of Police O'Hara, it suggested, had capabilities more suitable to the office of dogcatcher than chief.

In his office, Inspector Dugan flung the paper to his desk and stared at the man slumped in the evening shadows.

"Cheer up, Shep. Directing traffic won't be so bad."

"They can't do this to me."

"But b'gosh they *can,* Shep! I've talked to the legal department. According to Civil Service ordinances, they can't fire you from the Department, but they can demote you. Course, you've got thirty days to file an appeal—"

Millen snapped: "Deetsworth wasn't there. So I dropped into the director's office for a smoke. A mug poked a gun in the back of my head. There was a girl

across the desk who might get hurt. What would you have done?"

"The same as you. I aint blamin' you, Shep, but with this heat on—"

"When does my demotion go into effect?"

"Tomorrow morning at eight."

"I'm still head of the Homicide Bureau tonight, then?"

"What's on your mind?"

Millen stood up, paced to the window and stared at the lights of town spangling the night.

"Cracking the case," he said.

"If any man could do it, Shep, you're the one, but—"

"What have you got, so far?"

Not much, Dugan sighed. Nary a fingerprint. No idea where the bandit car went. But they did have three rogues' gallery photos, identified by a half-dozen witnesses. Dugan had been busy while Doc Bevans worked on Millen to make sure his skull hadn't been fractured.

At the desk, Millen stared down at the photographs of Monty Parris, alias the Dude; of Red Gyfer and Cecil (Tappy) Harmann.

He shuffled them into a neat pile, along with the dossiers.

"I'll be needing these," he said.

In his own office, he pored over the dossiers; then checked with the communications division to make sure that no response had come in from the broadcast and teletyped descriptions of the trio. Nothing had.

And he also checked with Thompson, one of his dicks, whose squad had been combing lodging-houses, cheap hotels, and the memories of stoolies. But nobody had seen the Dude or his men prior to the stick-up. They seemed to have swooped out of nowhere, pulled the job, and vanished into nowhere.

Millen riffled through the city directory, jotted down an address, left headquarters. The brim of his hat was yanked low, and his jaw was as lean and hard as the .38 beneath his arm. He climbed into his sedan—without official license-plates—and drove away.

PERCY REESE, the museum director, was a bachelor living at the Commander apartment hotel. When he responded to Millen's knock, he was clad in a purple dressing-gown, and he was smoking a cigarette in a long holder.

Millen accepted his invitation to sit down, but waved aside a highball.

"How well," he asked, "do you know Nicholas Deetsworth?"

"I know him casually. He drops into the museum now and then. But he's pretty much of a recluse."

"Do you know of anyone who would want to kill him?"

REESE sipped his drink. His eyes were fixed on his shoe-tips.

"No, of course not. Why?"

"He was scared he'd be killed at your party today. Last night he called the Commissioner and jabbered a lot of stuff about vague enemies. He wanted protection. That's why I was there this afternoon."

"He's a strange man," Reese said. "Let's sum it up by calling him a genius."

"Did he ever tell you he was afraid of being killed?"

Reese shrugged. "He's extremely neurotic, of course. Like most of the best artists. Supersensitive. He has hinted to me that he has enemies, but I've discounted it."

"Have you any idea who his enemies would be?"

"No. I don't believe he's particularly well liked—no one knows him well enough, and he's so strange and distant—but I can't think of anyone who would be his enemy."

"Do you know anyone he hates?"

Reese smiled. "I doubt if he loves anyone except himself. He isn't a very agreeable man."

"I mean—anyone specifically—"

Reese hesitated, then said:

"Perhaps I shouldn't say this. But he disliked my secretary extremely. Miss Clay. She was a rather breezy person, Mr. Millen. I believe she offended him once by making a derogatory remark about one of his canvases. And oddly enough, he disliked Mrs. R. Campbell Sylvester."

"Why?"

"Some old feud. Something that happened before I came to the museum. Mrs. Sylvester is—or was—rather typical of a certain type of club-woman. Until Mr. Deetsworth gained recognition elsewhere, she thought his paintings were bad, and she didn't conceal her opinion. In those days most people failed to recognize his genius, and I believe it embittered him. Mr. Wormhoudt was actually the only person in the city who didn't think him a half-mad paint-dauber. Of course, after his 'Indecision of a Crow' won the Kettle Gallery prize, everyone

climbed on his band-wagon—Mrs. Sylvester among them. But he has never forgiven her."

"Deetsworth would have been glad to see those women killed—is that it?"

"He won't do any weeping. But I'm certainly not suggesting that he hated them enough to bring about their deaths. There were probably other people at the exhibit that he hates just as much. He has a strange, dark, twisted mind. I doubt if he really likes anyone, except Mr. Wormhoudt."

"And he likes him because Wormhoudt bought his stuff?"

"Yes."

"How-come Wormhoudt bought his early paintings, when everyone else thought they were hooey?"

"Wormhoudt's no fool. Pretty discerning. He must have seen in those early paintings what everyone else was too stupid to see—an emerging genius struggling to express itself."

"What was this new painting of his —this 'Murder of the Sea Lioness'?"

"I didn't see it."

"But didn't you look at it when you set it up in the East Gallery?"

Reese shook his head. "Deetsworth insisted that nobody should see it till the unveiling. It didn't even arrive at the museum till ten minutes before the exhibit. The Edwards Transfer and Storage Company brought it. I'd been fretting around for fear it wouldn't arrive at all. I couldn't get in touch with Deetsworth because he doesn't have a phone, and I was afraid he'd decided not to exhibit it. The transfer-company men told me he'd secretly stored it there days ago, with instructions to deliver it to the museum at ten minutes of three."

"That sounds screwy."

Reese smiled. "You and I aren't the ones to judge a genius like Mr. Deetsworth. He evidently wanted to surprise us all. The canvas was wrapped in two layers of paper. I removed the outer layer and put the painting on the easel. On the layer of paper immediately covering the painting he had even lettered, *'Do not remove this paper till the unveiling.'*"

"Was the painting valuable?"

Reese shrugged. "How can one tell? Probably. It might well be his greatest painting."

"Which would make it worth—"

"What anybody would be willing to pay. Say fifteen hundred dollars as a starter. If the critics liked it, the price would go up. In appraising a painting's value, there are many imponderables—"

RED GYFER

Millen scowled. "What I can't figure is how mugs like Dude Parris would know enough about art to figure a painting was worth stealing."

Reese said: "It might be just their ignorance which would decide them to steal it. The layman often overvalues works of art—not because he himself would pay a big price for a painting, but because he has heard of the enormous prices paid for the old masters. He gets the idea that all paintings are equally valuable. It's quite possible that this Dude Parris person read about the exhibit and decided that the painting would be worth stealing. And he'd know that the exhibit would be attended by wealthy persons, wearing jewels—"

Millen stood up. "So now," he said, "all the police have got to do is find Dude Parris. That's all."

MILLEN parked outside a Drake Avenue address. It seemed an odd place for an artist's studio. It was a big building on the edge of the business district, resembling a courthouse or library more than a commercial plant.

Twin white globes were burning on each side of a door with a bronze sign:

Eddelby Printing & Engraving Company

The Eddelby Company printed enormous quantities of books, pamphlets, and calendars—anything anyone wanted. But even so, their business wasn't as big as they had expected when they constructed this new plant in boom times. They had no need for the fifth floor.

Reese had told Millen how, when prosperity showered checks on Nicholas Deetsworth, the artist had moved from his old rattletrap studio to a portion of the fifth floor here. It was ideal. There were great north-exposure windows that the Eddelby Company had intended for their engravers; but now those windows lighted the mocking paintings of Deetsworth.

The information-desk in the downstairs foyer was empty tonight, the offices unlighted. From the shop out back came the clicking of linotypes and the rumble of presses. Millen passed the deserted freight elevator and without encountering anybody, climbed the marble steps. The upper floors were dim and silent.

He found the stout door to Deetsworth's studio tightly locked. Tacked there a placard said: *"Please do not disturb. Do not knock. I do not want to buy anything. If you have business with me, write a letter. Do not waste energy knocking, for I will not reply. N. Deetsworth."*

"Such hospitality!" Millen thought. His knuckles rapped sharply on the door.

No response.

He knocked harder, and finally called: "Deetsworth! Open up!"

Silence.

Such vast indifference was exasperating. Probably the artist was inside, reading or painting.

On the corridor wall a pay telephone hung—when Deetsworth wanted to get in touch with the world, he had only to step outside his studio; yet the world could not reach him!

But Millen was going to reach him, somehow. At the end of the hall he opened a door and climbed steps to the roof. The night was moonless and coolish, and a little wind sniffed around up there. His flashlight guided him toward

Shep Millen murmured: "Poor crazy devil!" He knelt by the corpse.

the edge of the building, but before reaching it he came upon a skylighted section of roof, above Deetsworth's studio. The glass was heavy, its translucence reinforced with wire. One square was broken. He knelt, saw the broken portion formed part of a trapdoor; it was unlatched. He lifted it.

His flashlight beam shafted down into the dark studio. Everything was clear below him, so he eased through the trapdoor, hung by his hands, dropped. He landed, easily, like a cat.

Using his flashlight again, he found a wall switch. A brilliance like unnatural sunshine flooded the studio from long tubular bulbs.

It was a large room with a faint smell of oils and varnish and turpentine. Several deep chairs stood on the rug, and a monk's-cloth-covered couch was against the wall. Millen glanced at a desk littered with sketch-books, loose papers, letters. On a big stout easel a blank canvas stood.

DOZENS of pictures hung in the studio, and others were stacked three deep against the walls. They were of all sizes and in all mediums—oil, water-color, charcoal, pencil, pen-and-ink. All were signed *N. Deetsworth*, followed by numerals of the year he had drawn them.

What astonished Millen was that the earlier ones seemed the best. At least, the most real. Those dated earlier than 1926 were almost photographic in their fidelity to the landscapes and buildings they depicted. There were even two or three architect's drawings, signed *N. Deetsworth, Architect.* Millen then had a faint recollection that the man had been an architect before turning to painting.

Of the paintings dated from 1927 to 1933 Millen could make nothing. They were weird, bleary things, as if the artist had painted them while drunk or mad. One bluish canvas of a drowned man being eaten by a fish looked as if Deetsworth had painted it while sick with a hangover.

A sharp change was evident in the paintings dated from 1934 onward. The weirdness had vanished, replaced by savage humor; they were cartoons in brilliant oils.

Millen prowled from the studio along a short hall off which opened a perfectly ordered bathroom, and a kitchen. But the half-open door to the bedroom was not perfectly ordered. Near the knob, the wood had been splintered.

Millen switched on the bedroom light, and then he saw Nicholas Deetsworth. He was lying on the floor, clad in a pair of paint-spattered old trousers, a faded blue shirt. His thick glasses lay near his big head, one lens shattered.

Millen lighted a cigarette, pocketed his flashlight, murmured: "Poor crazy devil!"

He had been toying with the possibility that Deetsworth had hired those mugs to slay Mrs. R. Campbell Sylvester and Susan Clay, but now he realized how fantastic that had been. And now he knew that some sense of very real danger had driven Deetsworth to call the Commissioner last night.

Before examining the corpse, Millen glanced over the bedroom. The Eddelby Company must have originally intended it as a storeroom, for it was without windows. Everything in it was disarranged —the dresser standing out from the wall near the door, a chair overturned. Suddenly Millen understood.... Deetsworth must have fled here from somebody and locked the door, shoving the dresser against it. But the door had been splintered and the dresser shoved aside.

The bed was in wild disorder, some of the covers on the floor.

Millen knelt by the corpse. Death had come by strangulation: a Turkish towel had done the trick. Millen was no medico, but it must have occurred last night —for advanced *rigor mortis* had set in.

Burned matches were scattered on the floor; and when Millen looked at the man's feet, he saw why. They were bare and badly blistered. Deetsworth must have been held down on the bed—his struggling would account for its disorder —while someone else seared his toes with burning matches. Why? What secret had they been trying to torture out of him?

Money? But that was cuckoo. For although successful, Deetsworth certainly wasn't rich. There were dozens of more moneyed men in town.

THEN he thought of Dude Parris and his raid on the museum. He had stolen that painting. Maybe he had come here after it last night and tried to torture from Deetsworth the information as to its whereabouts. The artist must have kept mum to the very last, or Parris would have gone to the transfer company after it.

But the Dude's sudden interest in art was quite unaccountable.

Millen left the bedroom, found an ash-tray in the studio, snuffed out his cigarette. He was keyed up, but he also experienced a sense of leisure that no other case had ever given him. Except for the killers, he alone knew of Deetsworth's death; no reporters were yapping questions. His watch said five after ten. He had till eight o'clock in the morning. He sat down to think. . . . But everything boiled down to the fact that Dude Parris had wanted Deetsworth's latest painting badly enough to torture the artist and kill him, and to raid the exhibit.

GOING to the desk, Millen fingered through the letters and sketches and circulars, finding nothing of importance; then he tackled the desk drawers. He came upon a stack of Deetsworth's returned checks, and his checkbook.

The stubs indicated that his last check had been drawn five days ago, to the James Orr Photographic Studio, for eight dollars. Good Lord, weren't there enough pictures around here without Deetsworth getting photographs too? But Millen filed the name in his mind, and shuffled through the returned checks.

Seven months ago a name began appearing among those checks. The first was drawn for thirty dollars. The next for seventy. The next for a hundred and five. The one drawn last month was for a hundred and twenty-five. They were made out to *R. Campbell Sylvester, M.D.*

Millen returned to the bedroom and searched Deetsworth's pockets. . . . They yielded a crumpled pack of cigarettes and a leather key-case. One key, he discovered, fitted the lock of the studio door; so he turned out the lights, pocketed the case, and stepped to the pay telephone in the outer corridor.

He dialed Dr. R. Campbell Sylvester's home. A maid said that the physician was out. She didn't know where. The Doctor was grief-stricken, said the maid; wanting to be alone with his sorrow, he had climbed into his car and gone driving somewhere. She had no idea when he would return. So Millen dialed the Doctor's office, but there was no response.

The phone-book indicated that James Orr maintained his photographic studio at his home in the Mallard Park suburban district.

"This is Orr speaking," a heavy-voiced man said.

"You did some work recently for Nicholas Deetsworth, didn't you?"

"For who?"

"Nicholas Deetsworth."

"Never heard of him."

The receiver buzzed in Millen's ear; the man had abruptly hung up.

"You're a liar," Millen told the phone, and started to dial the number again. But instead he called Headquarters. He didn't mention Nicholas Deetsworth; he asked questions. But there was no new information about Dude Parris. Sheriffs and highway patrolmen and police in several States were keeping a keen lookout for him and his men, but no one had seen them. Up in Redford County four men had been halted, but they had identified themselves as honest citizens on a fishing-trip.

Nor had any of the Department's stool pigeons or undercover men found so much as a trace of Parris' back-trail. He and his men had managed to pull the job and vanish without a single contact with the local underworld. Very odd!

Millen broke the connection, then immediately called back and asked the police switchboard operator to give him the press-room.

"Is McGuire there?"

Tad McGuire of the Morning *Tribune* said, "Yeah," in a very bored voice.

"This is Shep Millen. Don't say a word—just listen. How would you like to beat the *Herald* on a good yarn?"

"You sound like Santa Claus."

"Can you meet me in ten minutes at the Doughnut Hole?"

McGuire said: "Listen. I'll pay you that five tomorrow. We're in a poker-game right now. . . . Huh? Oh, well, all right—ten minutes."

Grinning, Millen hung up, jotted down the address of the photographic studio, left the building. And again in leaving he encountered nobody. Probably last night the killers had been able to come here and depart without being seen.

THE Doughnut Hole was a greasy lunch-counter near Headquarters; Millen pulled up outside and honked. McGuire, a red-headed young man who could have stood a shave, shambled out and climbed into Millen's car.

"What's the yarn?" he asked.

"You'll get it," Millen said, "and it's plenty big. But first I want you to do something for me."

McGuire groaned. "Work, work—nothing but work! Sleeping all day and playing poker all night! It's getting me down. What's the yarn? I've got a two A.M. deadline for the city final—"

"You'll have it by then. I'll meet you here in an hour. In the meantime I want you to do some research."

"That sounds like hard work. Lemme out of here—"

"The *Tribune* has a pretty good morgue, hasn't it?"

"Fair. A hundred thousand photographs, seventy thousand clippings—"

"All right. I want you to get me everything you have on these people. Better write down their names: Percy Reese. . . . Nicholas Deetsworth. . . . Felix Wormhoudt. . . . Dr. R. Campbell Sylvester. . . . Mrs. Sylvester. . . . Susan Clay. . . . James Orr. Would you just as soon do that?"

"I wouldn't just as soon, but I will. But the yarn better be good. . . . Is it about those museum croakings?"

"Yes."

"A break in the case?"

"A crack, at least."

MILLEN dropped McGuire outside the *Tribune* building and drove on toward Mallard Park. It was an area of dingy stucco bungalows and dingier old square houses. A sign in the yard of the combined house and studio proclaimed:

Fine Photographs at Reasonable Prices.

The house was dark. It stood back from the street on a level lawn, and Millen noted that one corner of the house had been made over into a studio with many panes of glass. He pounded the front door, and finally an upstairs window creaked and a man called:

"Who is it?"

"Special Delivery."

The window banged, and presently a light came on inside. Through the glass door Millen saw a man with rumpled dark hair, wearing a bathrobe over pajamas. The porch light flashed on, and the door opened.

Revealing his badge, Millen quickly stepped over the threshold.

The man scowled.

"What do you want?" he grumbled. "I haven't done anything."

Millen snapped: "Why did you tell me on the phone you'd never heard of Nicholas Deetsworth?"

"So that was you!"

"You did some work a few days ago for Deetsworth, didn't you?"

"Suppose I did? What of it?"

Orr's eyes were dark in pools of shadow. His broad hands twitched at his side, and he kept nibbling his lip.

Millen said: "He's dead."

"He's what?"

"He's quit breathing."

"What's that got to do with me?"

Millen let him wait for a reply. He glanced about the room. It had been fixed up as a waiting-room for studio patrons—photos on the walls, an album of sample photos on the davenport end-table.

"I don't know," Millen said at last. "Maybe nothing. Maybe you can go back to bed. Maybe I'll take you down to Headquarters." The room grew still except for Orr's breathing. Suddenly Millen shot out his forefinger and barked: "Are you going to tell me what you know?"

Orr shrugged, smiled palely, swallowed.

"Sure," he said. "Sure I am. What made you think I wouldn't?"

"When did Deetsworth come here?"

"He didn't come here. He phoned. I took a camera over to his studio and took a picture of a big painting. That was a week ago today. A couple of days later I delivered the print, and he paid me. That was all."

"What was the painting called?"

"I forget—something about a sea lion."

"How did Deetsworth act when you were at his studio?"

"He acted like he had fleas. Kinda jumpy, like something was nipping him. And then he'd bring that big face of his close to mine and stare at me with those big funny eyes."

"DO you have the negative of that photo?" Millen asked.

"The plate? No."

"Don't tell me that. You wouldn't destroy a plate this soon—"

"I sold it," Orr said. And he added quickly: "Don't look at me like that. This may sound funny, but a guy came here Saturday and bought the plate. For fifty bucks cash."

"Who was he?"

"He didn't say. He said he was from the Municipal Art Museum. He said a guy named Reese had sent him."

"What did he look like?"

"He was pink. Kind of soft and fat, with a pink complexion like a baby's. About fifty. He was bald except for a fringe of hair—gray hair. Well-dressed guy. . . . And he made me promise I wouldn't say anything to anybody about the deal. He said I shouldn't peep about taking the picture for Deetsworth. He said if anybody ever asked me about it, to say I'd never heard of Deetsworth."

Millen asked: "Could you describe that painting for me?"

"Sure I could—but what's the use? I've got a duplicate print. I always make a duplicate for my files."

"Did you tell the pink guy that?"

"About the duplicate print? No—why should I? He didn't ask."

Millen followed the photographer into a little office and waited while he pulled out the drawer of a steel file.

"Here it is," he said. "Not a very pretty painting, if you ask me."

DECIDEDLY the picture was not pretty. It was a sick picture, like something a madman had dreamed. Even in black-and-white, without the weird coloring Deetsworth infused into his work, it was horrible. It combined the unlovely quality of that painting of a drowned man with the savage satire that Deetsworth's later work possessed.

In the foreground of the picture a fat woman was sinking to earth, clutching a wound in her left side above her heart. She had just been shot by a fat man who still held a smoking revolver. Only, the woman after all was not a woman—when you glanced more closely, you saw that instead of feet she possessed the tail of a seal. She was a seal dressed in a woman's fine gown, and her hands were more like a seal's flappers than human hands. A very fine seal-like mustache hung from her lips; but her head with its intricately-piled white hair was a woman's.

The fat man who had shot her was smiling. His legs were planted powerfully apart; power surged along the arm that held the gun.

Incongruously, the edges of the picture were decorated with pretty little cupids. And in one corner there lolled a plump smiling mermaid.

And to pile horror on horror, in the center background there was hazy foam like a blob of ectoplasm; and stark in the midst of that foam a bleak gallows stood. From the crossbar a man was hanging, ankles and wrists strapped, head hooded.

Millen turned the photo over; on the back was rubber-stamped: *"James Orr Photographic Studio."*

He asked: "Was your name stamped on the back of the print you delivered to Deetsworth?"

"Sure. I stamp every picture I take. Good advertising."

"In this case it made you fifty bucks," Millen said. "Thanks for the print. You can go back to bed, now."

Tad McGuire saw Millen pulling up to the curb, and he left the Doughnut Hole with a big brown envelope under his arm.

"Here's the junk you wanted, Shep," he said, lounging into the car. "Haven't worked so hard since my wife fell in the cistern—and I kept lugging more water to pour in. . . . Where we going?"

"Back to the *Tribune*. If you want to beat the town, you won't want to dictate this one from Headquarters."

"You know," McGuire yawned, "you got brains. Damned near smart enough to be a newspaper man! What's the yarn?"

"Nicholas Deetsworth is dead."

"Well, I'll be damned! Swell! How'd he kick in?"

"Murdered. Choked to death."

"Yea, man! Bless the old screwball's heart. Who did it?"

"Say that the police believe a woman was involved. Actual murderer is known but not yet apprehended. Police are on the verge of making arrests—"

"That smells, Shep."

"Sure. But say it. Time of death was probably Tuesday night, and murderer gained entrance by a broken skylight in the roof of his studio. Choked him with a towel. Evidences of a struggle. Crime discovered by a Mr. Shep Millen, head of the Homicide Bureau. Mr. Millen, whose demotion takes effect at eight o'clock Thursday morning, had gone to Deetsworth's studio while investigating the slayings of Wednesday afternoon at the Municipal Museum—"

"Connection between the two crimes?"

"For your information—yes. For print—no. Not just yet. You can say, too, that—now get this, for it's important—that a diary was discovered in Deetsworth's studio. A diary that the artist had kept for twenty years. Police are reading this diary, and expect it to yield important information."

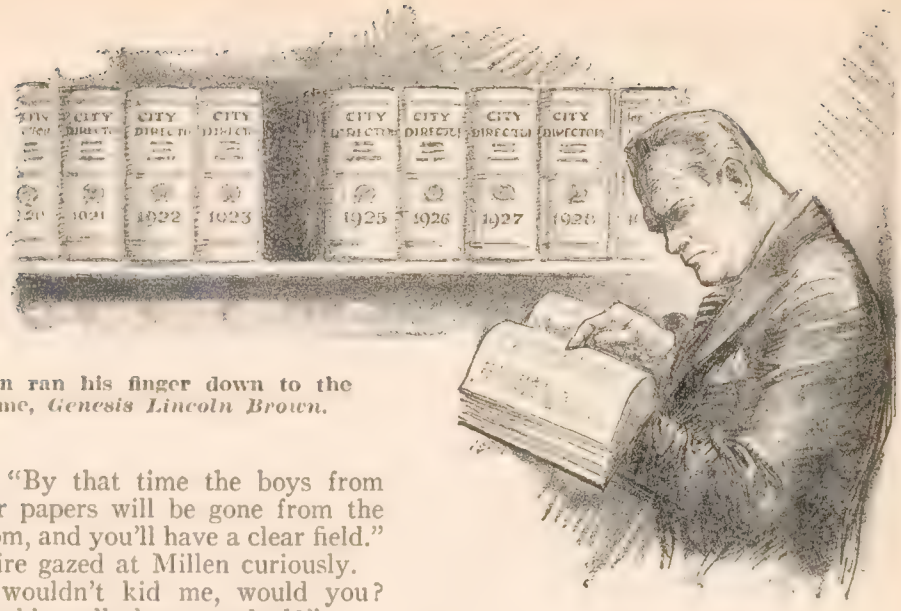
"Was there a diary?"

"No—but police say so; so you'll say so, won't you?"

"Hell, yes. I'll say he choked to death on an all-day sucker, if you say so. But for heaven's sake, Shep, remember this yarn will go out on the wires. The A.P. will grab it. Deetsworth may have been a screwball, but he was an important artist."

Millen pulled in at the curb outside the *Tribune* building and filled in the remaining facts.

"I won't mention Deetsworth's death at Headquarters till two A.M.," he con-



Millen ran his finger down to the name, *Genesis Lincoln Brown.*

cluded. "By that time the boys from the other papers will be gone from the press-room, and you'll have a clear field."

McGuire gazed at Millen curiously.

"You wouldn't kid me, would you? Deetsworth's really been croaked?"

"Sure he's croaked. Why?"

McGuire sighed. "I've been in the newspaper game for fifteen long hard years. It's broken my arches, ruined my digestion, given me delirium tremens. But this is the first time a cop ever worked so hard to give me a scoop. What's the game, Shep? You're not doing all this because you think my red hair's so pretty."

Millen grinned. "It's on the level," he said. "I have a reason for wanting you to break the yarn first. I'm using you, sure, but I'm also doing you a favor."

"I hope so," McGuire said. And he murmured: "'*Detective slain by reporter. Reporter runs amuck after getting phony yarn.*'"

Millen said: "Another thing: Come on over to Headquarters after your city final goes to press. And bring along a few copies of the paper with the yarn."

McGuire stepped from the car, thumbed his nose, wiggled his fingers, grinned and said:

"Okay, Shepherd. See you later."

THREE dicks were matching pennies in his outer office when Millen entered. He plied them with questions, but their responses carried only stale information. Dude Parris and his companions had not been apprehended.

"All right—here's some exercise for you. Thompson, you and O'Brien go out to the Commander hotel and pick up Percy Reese. Book him for investigation and lock him up."

Thompson said: "Reese is museum director, aint he? Shep, are you sure that crack on the head left you feelin' all right?"

Millen said he felt fine; and closed the door of his inner office. He picked up the phone and talked again to a maid at Dr. R. Campbell Sylvester's home. The Doctor was still out, she said. Millen broke the connection, then talked to the switchboard operator.

"From now on," he said, "I want you to call Dr. Sylvester's home every fifteen minutes and ask for him. As soon as he's in, connect me."

Then he cleared off his desk and dumped out the contents of the big envelope McGuire had given him. There were a great lot of clippings and photos. Through many years these had been carefully dated and filed by the staff of the *Tribune's* library, or "morgue." Every paper, Millen knew, maintained such a morgue. By collecting pictures and information, a newspaper had at its fingertips a wealth of facts about any person who went ricocheting into the news.

In this batch there was nothing at all about James Orr. This was to be expected. The less prominent a person, the less mention of him in a newspaper.

Nor was there anything on Susan Clay. But Mrs. R. Campbell Sylvester stared archly out from several photographs, and her activities were chronicled in numerous clippings from the society section. Always she had been entertaining at bridge, or serving as chairman of some woman's-club committee.

Her husband had made fewer though more important appearances in print. Once he had been interviewed about the

new type of invisible spectacles which myopic debs and movie stars liked. A few years back he had been made a director of the Merchants' National Bank and Trust Company. In 1937 he was elected vice-president of a national association of eye, ear, nose and throat physicians. His photograph revealed him as a sharp-looking specialist—keen eyes, a clipped gray mustache.

The clippings about Reese began back in 1935, with an interview upon his arrival to become museum director. He had served other cities in a similar capacity; he had studied in Paris; and he was especially glad to come here, he said, because this was the home of that splendid artist Nicholas Deetsworth.

A mass of clippings concerned Deetsworth. References to him began as early as 1921, when he was an architect. Beneath the pictures of several small houses, printed to encourage the idea that a building boom was under way, there was the agate line *"N. Deetsworth, Architect.* Then in 1923 the *Tribune* had published a half-column feature story. *"Local Architect Turns to Painting,"* said the headline. It recounted how Deetsworth was giving up his office in the Exchange building to occupy a studio in the old Sampson Block.

"As an architect, I've felt like a square peg in a round hole," Deetsworth had told the reporter. "For years the urge to paint has been boiling within me, and I'm cutting loose now to follow the star of my destiny, despite the warnings of my friends that I'll likely starve."

Millen thought: "He was probably starving as an architect. Bet he owed back rent in the Exchange building, and they turned him out."

FOR a number of years, no more clippings about him had been cut from the *Tribune,* but that paper's morgue had filled in with stories from the opposition *Herald.* Millen saw why. Felix Wormhoudt owned the *Herald,* and whenever Wormhoudt had purchased a Deetsworth painting, the *Herald* recounted the fact and used a reproduction of the canvas. But naturally the *Tribune* wasn't going to give publicity to Wormhoudt—or to Deetsworth, so long as Wormhoudt was his principal customer.

But in 1936, when Deetsworth took first prize at the Kettle Gallery in New York, the *Tribune* had to come to it. They interviewed Deetsworth, as did the *Herald.* The interviews were substantially the same, except that the *Tribune* left out one statement of Deetsworth which the *Herald* used.

"And may I say," Deetsworth had stated, "that except for one man, I long ago would have flung aside my brushes in despair. I mean Felix Wormhoudt. When I felt the whole world was against me, he bought an occasional painting, and I managed to exist—sometimes, to be sure, on crackers and cheese—on the proceeds from those sales."

BOTH papers reproduced the prize-winning painting, "Indecision of a Crow." At first glance Millen wondered why any judges would award it even a booby prize; but as he stared at it, the picture somehow took hold of him. Despite everything, there was a good deal of substance in Deetsworth's paintings—they were hard to forget, like a bad dream or an accident.

This one depicted a crow in a barnyard. You knew somehow that the crow was a male, just as you knew that another crow on the left side of the picture was a female. On the right side lay a big ear of corn, golden and tempting. The center crow seemed trying to make up his mind whether to peck at the corn or turn to the other crow.

Even badly reproduced in a newspaper, the picture exuded a certain malice that Millen found disturbing. Those were crows—but they were human beings also. You felt that Deetsworth hated humanity with a savage, mocking hate.

Suddenly Millen sucked in his breath. There was no doubt of it—that center crow looked like a man, a man he knew. The thin beak, the supercilious air, even the faint suggestion of nose-glasses—it resembled Percy Reese!

He scrutinized the other crow. His blood ran faster. Maybe he imagined it, but it did seem that the hen crow bore some resemblance to Susan Clay. . . .

The phone rang. The switchboard operator had Dr. R. Campbell Sylvester on the line. The specialist's voice was wan and colorless with grief. Millen asked him several questions, said, "That's all, Doctor—thanks," and hung up. That explained those checks—Sylvester had been Deetsworth's oculist.

Millen turned to the clippings about Felix Wormhoudt.

The *Tribune* morgue had filed more material about Wormhoudt—most of it was from the *Herald*—than about all the others combined. He was one of the

biggest frogs in the city pond—even in the Midwest pond, for his real-estate and industrial and newspaper holdings extended through a half-dozen States.

By arranging the clippings chronologically, Millen had a running film of the man's upsurge to financial power. Except for his purchase of Deetsworth's paintings, and his position as board chairman of the Municipal Museum of Art, he had evidenced not the faintest interest in anything except acquiring money. In climbing the ladder of success, he had used an elevator—his first wife, Maud Manson. It was astonishing how rapidly Wormhoudt soared in her father's business after their marriage in 1910.

It might have been love, but it assuredly wasn't young love. Wormhoudt was thirty at the time; and in her engagement picture Maud looked at least that old. She was not beautiful—no photographic subtleties could make her that.

She was an only child, and following her father's death in 1915, Wormhoudt began branching out—acquiring, acquiring. In 1917 and 1918 war orders helped bloat his income. He bought the *Herald* in 1920, the Exchange building in 1923, other papers in other cities—the old yarn of the rolling snowball.

In 1924 Maud Manson Wormhoudt committed suicide. There were three witnesses. Her health had not been good; she took her own life in a fit of despondency—of temporary insanity, the coroner reported.

Her suicide occurred one night when she appeared on the top floor of the Exchange building, where Wormhoudt had recently established offices for his Sun-Acme Corporation, a holding company that owned other holding companies that in turn owned his various enterprises. It was early March, and with Floretta Conrad, his secretary, he was laboring over income-tax returns.

AT the inquest, he and Miss Conrad testified that Maud Wormhoudt had burst into the office and exclaimed:

"Felix dear—I've discovered something. I can walk on air."

The statement was doubly ridiculous because the years had padded Maud Wormhoudt's body with heavy cushions of fat. She waddled to a window, flung it up and started to jump. Just in time, Felix Wormhoudt stopped her. It grieved her. Tears rolled down her fat cheeks; she sank into his desk-chair and sobbed that he didn't believe her; he thought she was a fat middle-aged woman, but really she had a figure so light—so very light—that she would float like thistledown, if given a chance.

"Maud," he said sternly, "you must go home. You are unwell."

"You think I'm crazy, don't you?" she blazed. "I'll show you. You'll—"

His desk drawer was open a little; and inside lay an automatic pistol. He kept it there in case of emergency. She snatched it, put it against her breast; and before he could prevent it, she had killed herself.

The actual shooting was witnessed not only by Wormhoudt and his secretary, but by Genesis Lincoln Brown as well. Mr. Brown, a colored janitor, had been mopping the hall; the loud confusion had attracted him into the office. Just as he appeared in the doorway to offer aid, Mrs. Wormhoudt took her own life.

Prostrated by grief, Felix Wormhoudt took a three months' vacation. Naturally, he was accompanied by his secretary, for a man of such great affairs couldn't ever take a complete rest.

In 1925 he married Floretta Conrad.

MILLEN strolled over to a bookcase, where reposed city directories for the past thirty years. Pulling out the volume for 1924, he ran his finger down a page to the name, *Genesis Lincoln Brown, Janitor Exchange bldg.* Then he searched for Mr. Brown's name in the 1925 directory, but it was absent.

A knock fell on his door; it was Thompson.

"We've got Reese," he said. "He's sore as a boil."

"Good."

"Want to talk to him?"

"Not yet." Millen glanced at his watch. A quarter of two. "Here's something else. Call the coroner and have him meet you at Nicholas Deetsworth's studio on the top floor of the Eddelby plant. You and O'Brien go, and have an ambulance too. This key will unlock the studio door."

"What's wrong at the studio?"

Millen told him. "And send in Cox," he added as Thompson left.

Barney Cox was the youngest dick attached to the Homicide Bureau.

"Here's something, Barney," Millen said. "I want you to check through all our records for violent deaths from March first, 1924. See if you can find anything about Genesis Lincoln Brown."

"You mean homicides?"

"Anything. Accidents, suicides—anything. Oh, yes—and send in Swanson."

He instructed Swanson to check with all telegraph and messenger companies to learn if Nicholas Deetsworth had recently made use of their services. Then he had Patrick and Wylie bring in Reese.

REESE was steaming angry, but freezingly so, rather like dry ice. He knew his constitutional rights! They couldn't do this to him! He wanted a lawyer!

Millen let him run down, then dangled the reproduction of "Indecision of a Crow" before his glasses.

"That crow looks like you," he said.

"Why shouldn't it?" Reese snapped. "Mr. Deetsworth had my lineaments in mind when he painted it."

"Didn't that make you mad?"

"Certainly not. I felt honored."

"You mean it was okay with you for a fellow to picture you as a crow?"

"Mr. Millen," Reese said haughtily, "Deetsworth is a great artist. If in some small measure I could be of service to him, I was only too happy—"

He actually seemed to mean it.

"That other crow looks like Susan Clay," Millen said.

"It resembles her faintly."

"How did she feel about it?"

"It annoyed her. As I told you this evening, she and Deetsworth were antagonistic."

"Why did you send a man to James Orr?" Millen barked.

Reese's face went blank. "Why did I do what?"

"Why did you pay fifty dollars for that plate?"

"I'm sorry, but I simply don't know what you're talking about."

"When Deetsworth's 'Murder of the Sea Lioness' didn't arrive at the museum, were you upset?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I'm the director. We had announced that the painting would be unveiled. Of course I was upset. I think it was thoughtless of Deetsworth. I was very much relieved when the transfer company brought it."

"Who else was upset?"

"Why, Susan Clay was—and Mrs. Sylvester—everybody."

"Was Wormhoudt?"

"Yes."

"He was more upset than anybody, wasn't he?"

"What the hell do you birds want?" demanded Wormhoudt.

"He was very eager to see it, if that's what you mean. He kept calling to see if it had arrived."

Millen said: "I've got a photograph of that painting that was stolen."

"A photograph? Really? May I—"

Millen held it before his nose. Reese's eyes lighted and he smiled.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "One of Deetsworth's best. The very flowering of his later manner. The critics will—"

"Who does that fat man look like?"

Reese's smile broadened.

"Wormhoudt!" he exclaimed. "That's wonderful. Mr. Wormhoudt will be so pleased."

"Don't kid me. Wormhoudt will be sore as hell."

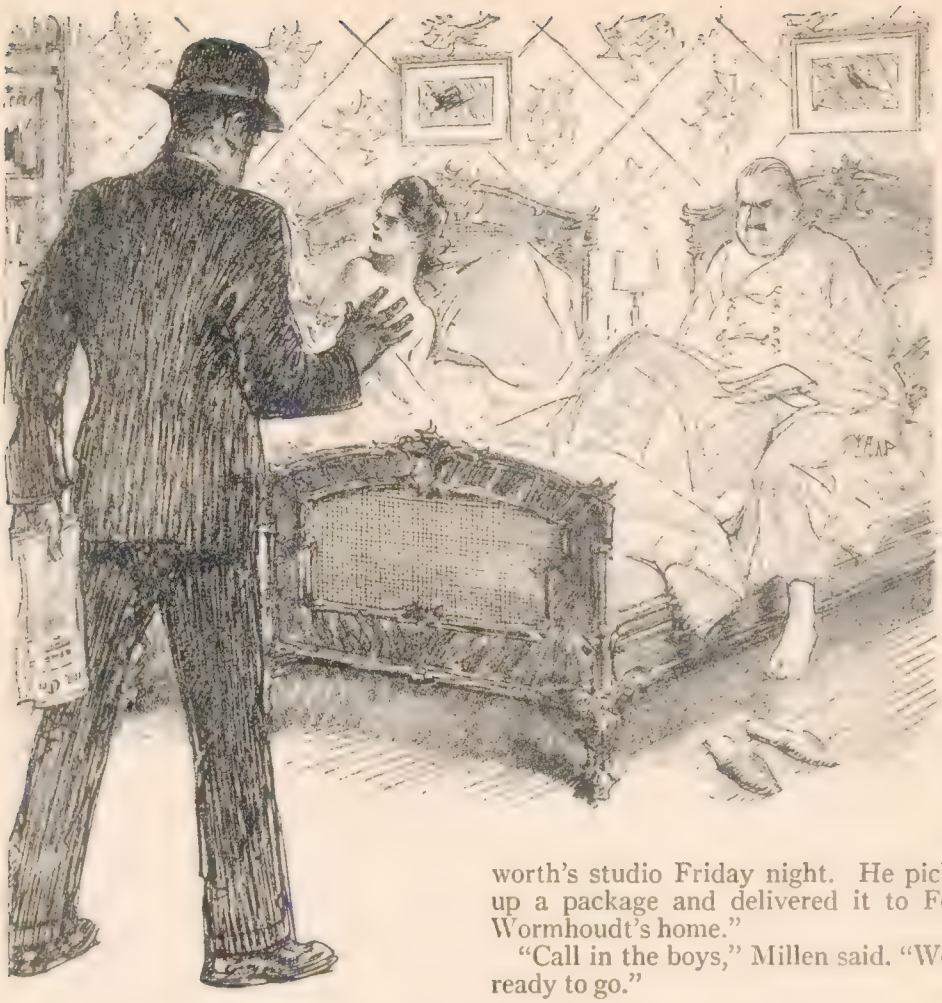
Reese stiffened. "Mr. Millen, your viewpoint is simply not that of the connoisseur. Why, this assures Mr. Wormhoudt immortality. Deetsworth has used him as a model—"

Millen waved a hand at Wylie and Patrick.

"Take him away—take him away!"

"Back to that filthy cell? Mr. Millen, I demand—"

"We'll turn you loose in the morning," Millen sighed. "Maybe before. So pipe down."



And as Reese was escorted through the door, Cox appeared.

"About Genesis Lincoln Brown, Shep: he was a dinge, did you know that?"

"Yes."

"He was killed in June, 1924. Hit-and-run driver. It happened one evening on Park Boulevard. The driver was never found."

"Swell!"

Millen stacked all the clippings and pictures together, put them in a folder, filed it.

Then Tad McGuire arrived, carrying several heavily-inked copies of the Morning *Tribune*.

"How's this, Shep?"

He held up a front page across which big letters shouted that Deetsworth had been murdered.

"Just a minute," Millen said. And he called to Swanson, who had appeared at the threshold: "What did you find out?"

"Mercury Messenger Service has a record of a messenger going to Deetsworth's studio Friday night. He picked up a package and delivered it to Felix Wormhoudt's home."

"Call in the boys," Millen said. "We're ready to go."

EVERYTHING about the bedroom was sumptuous; even the very darkness had a rich, silken quality. But the man whose avoirdupois bowed down one twin bed had not achieved anything like sound sleep. In these later years Felix Wormhoudt had been plagued much by insomnia. Tonight a thin doze had at last veneered his consciousness; and then somewhere deep in the house a bell began tinkling.

He rose to an elbow, listening. Presently he heard footsteps and a discreet knock on the door. He snapped on the rosy lamp on the table between his bed and that of his wife.

"Come," he bade the servant.

Wimsell was a genuine imported English butler. Even in pajamas and dressing-gown he was just slightly more formal than an ambassador.

"Very sorry, Mr. Wormhoudt, but these gentlemen—"

Two men jostled past him into the room. Thompson was chewing a cold

cigar, and O'Brien carried a folded newspaper.

"You are Mrs. Felix Wormhoudt?" Thompson demanded of the tousled little bundle of curves in baby-blue pajamas.

"What do you think?" she replied.

"What the hell do you birds want?" Felix Wormhoudt demanded.

Thompson ignored him. "You're pinched," he told Floretta Wormhoudt.

"Damn you—get out of here," she said.

WORMHOUDT'S broad feet thudded against the floor; he yanked on a dressing-gown. Purple rage bloomed in his face.

"I'll have you know—"

"Take it easy, big boy," O'Brien said. A revolver had come into his hand. "Seen this?" he asked, tossing Wormhoudt the Morning *Tribune*.

The newspaper unrippled in his beefy hands; his eyes gulped down the story of Deetsworth's murder.

He exclaimed: "Good heavens, Floretta—Nick Deetsworth has been killed!" Then he thundered at O'Brien: "Well, what has that got to do with us?"

"Nothing with you personally, far as I know. But we've had orders to pick up Mrs. Wormhoudt and take her to Headquarters, and—"

"I won't go," she said. "I'm Mrs. Felix Wormhoudt, and—"

The pupils of Wormhoudt's eyes contracted; in a cold, smooth voice he said: "You'd better go, Floretta. Remember, you don't have to answer any questions. I'll call Hudson. He'll get Judge Sanford up and have him sign a writ. We'll have you loose almost before you get to Headquarters. This is all ridiculous—and as for these fellows, they'll have a charge of false arrest facing them."

"But I don't want to—"

"Now, dear." Wormhoudt stepped to her, patted her shoulder, gave her a significant look. "Get dressed, dear."

"I can't dress before these men—"

"They'll wait in the hall."

"With the door open," Thompson said. "She can stay out of range of the door, but you stay where we can see you."

Wormhoudt laughed shortly. "Anything to accommodate you." While they retired, he picked up a bedside phone.

"Hudson? Wormhoudt speaking. . . . Sorry to bother you at this hour, but—"

And he outlined the situation. After hanging up, he said: "Everything's going to be all right, Floretta. Hudson says it's fantastic for you to be arrested."

Rapidly he pulled on his own clothes, folding the Morning *Tribune* and sticking it into his coat pocket. When she was dressed, he accompanied her and the detectives downstairs.

At the front door she said: "Felix, you come along with me."

"Now, dear—I know what's best. I'll meet Hudson and come with him."

Her high heels tocked over the threshold; he watched her entering the car. He closed the door, dived for the hall phone, dialed quickly.

"Ealey? Something's happened. Yeah. Be right over."

He jammed on his hat, jerked car keys from his pocket, and hurried outdoors and around to the four-car garage.

A tall lilac hedge separated Felix Wormhoudt's driveway from the driveway next door. In the shadows of the second driveway a sedan waited, its lights off, its motor purring.

Three sub-machine-guns and five men were crowded in the car. They weren't smoking, nor talking—just waiting.

A police car slid from Wormhoudt's drive and turned toward the business district. That would be Thompson and O'Brien with Mrs. Wormhoudt. Millen's fingers tightened on the wheel.

THEN, coming down the Wormhoudt drive, another car's headlights silhouetted the lilac leaves: A roadster; it shot from the drive and skimmed along the avenue in the opposite direction from that taken by the police car.

Millen eased his sedan into the street, stepped on the gas. Keeping his headlights dark, he speeded up to within a half-block of the roadster and held that distance between them. If he lost sight of Wormhoudt's car, his plans would crash. But he couldn't tag too close, lest Wormhoudt get wind that he was being tailed and simply circle back home.

At Harrington Drive the roadster left the avenue and headed into the swanky Pleasant Knolls residential district. Millen stepped on the gas, curved fast into Harrington Drive. The roadster's taillights were ruddy will-o'-the-wisps, beckoning him along the winding street past dark houses on big lawns.

Millen rounded a curve just in time to glimpse the roadster ducking into a driveway on the left side of the street. Its lights flashed along the drive and disappeared behind the long Colonial house. Millen coasted to the curb, switched off the motor.

"Anyone know that house?"

"This used to be my beat when I was in harness," Swanson replied. "That's Fletcher Ealey's place."

Fletcher Ealey was the slickest criminal lawyer in the State. He wouldn't defend anyone unless the accused person had stolen a minimum of fifteen thousand, or had killed somebody.

IN a low, almost casual voice, Millen said:

"All right. Swanson, you and Breheny and Kane take the front and sides of the house. Cox and I will take the back."

A low hedge separated Ealey's lawn from his neighbor's. Carrying a sub-machine-gun, Millen went ducking through that shadowy yard next door, close to the hedge. Presently he halted, peered over the hedge. A light was burning on Ealey's back porch. Wormhoudt's roadster stood empty on a concrete space between the house and the garage.

It was a large garage, with vines climbing its brick walls to grow between the curtained windows of its second story.

Millen edged his body into the hedge and wriggled through, followed by Barney Cox. Cox had his revolver out; the past month he had won first prize on the police pistol range. He was impatient.

"Let's go in the house after 'em, Shep."

Millen shook his head, led the way to a deep pool of shadow cast by a snowball bush. He was gazing reflectively at those second-story garage windows.

They squatted in the shadows, waiting. Except for their own breathing, everything was quiet. Deep slumber wrapped the whole neighborhood. Once, blocks away, Millen heard an owl car limping along on a flat wheel. For a weary moment he thought it would be nice to be a solid citizen, winding the clock at eleven and putting out the cat and tumbling into bed. But—gosh, he'd grow bored!

"Shep," Cox whispered, "maybe we should—"

"Take it easy."

A minute ticked away. Another. In the night-blue sky all the stars were blazing, and the milky way was a swath of smudgy light. His thoughts trooped back over the case, and for a mad second he thought of those dead people trudging along that dusty sky-trail—Susan Clay and Mrs. Sylvester and Nicholas Deetsworth. Yes, and Mrs. Wormhoudt, too—the first Mrs. Wormhoudt.

Then a sound jerked him back to perilous reality.

The back door of Ealey's house had opened. Felix Wormhoudt and Ealey crossed the porch and walked toward the roadster. Ealey wore no hat—evidently he was just seeing his guest to his car. Millen saw that he was about fifty—a soft, pink-skinned man whose bald head was fringed with a rim of gray hair.

"Just keep your head," Ealey was saying. "Everything's under control."

Millen stepped into the light.

"Don't move," he said.

The two men stopped in their tracks.

"What do you want?" Wormhoudt barked.

"The game's over," Millen said. "All washed up. The whistle blew a long time ago."

Suddenly Wormhoudt's big paw dived into his pocket and came out with an automatic.

"Drop it!" Millen ordered, gripping the machine-gun. But, Lordy—at this range it would cut the man in two!

Wormhoudt squeezed the trigger; something zinged past Millen's ear; then a shot exploded at his side. The automatic clattered to the concrete. Wormhoudt yowled and clutched his wrist, which Cox had plugged. Then he leaned over swiftly and snatched up his gun. Cox fired again—still again. Wormhoudt sprawled like a clumsy rhinoceros shot by an explorer's rifle.

Ealey whirled toward the house. Cox's bullet struck his left leg, and he fell.

Then, from those second-story garage windows came the crash of splintered glass, followed by red spitting of guns. Cox jumped back and lay flat behind the snowball bush; Millen leaped for the house-side. Then he poked the gun-snout around the corner and opened up.

Back and forth across those windows he sprayed a stream of lead. Dimly above the clatter he heard yells from the garage. Then he paused.

FROM flat on the concrete, Ealey groaned: "Don't shoot any more—I'm in your cross-fire."

From the snowball bush Cox darted to Millen's side.

"Let me make 'em cry," he pleaded.

Millen nodded, said: "Be careful."

Fast and nimble as a squirrel, Cox dashed to the roadster's protection, then ducked to the garage, then behind it.

Silence.

And then a couple of little crashes—that would be Cox's tear-gas entering the rear upper windows of the garage.

Millen heard a murmur from up there —a cough, muffled voices, the sound of feet on wooden steps. Then on the first floor of the garage a car's starter sneezed, a motor roared.

Millen dived for the cover of the roadster just as a sedan bearing two men streaked fast from the garage.

It was quick, but his bullets were quicker. They poured into the shadowy figures in the front seat. The sedan careened wildly, smashed into the rear wall of Ealey's house.

Millen stopped firing, but like an echo more firing sounded from the other side of the house. Swanson and Breheny and Kane hadn't been idle.

Ealey groaned. "My leg—damn you!" he muttered. "I'll never be able to walk."

"You won't be doing much walking, where you're going," Millen told him.

THE next couple of hours were busy ones. When Millen finally entered his office, daybreak was sneaking through the windows. Tad McGuire of the *Tribune* lay sprawled in a chair with his hat over his face, and Inspector Dugan was sitting with his feet on Millen's desk.

McGuire snapped awake, and Dugan's feet hit the floor. They started asking questions. Millen couldn't reply, because his lips were engaged in whistling a tuneless melody.

"So you won't talk, eh?" grinned McGuire.

Millen grinned too. "Why should I? At eight o'clock I start directing traffic. I'm saving my voice to bawl out desperadoes who run through red lights."

Dugan groaned. "You'll never let us forget that! The Commissioner ate his words an hour and a half ago—"

"He ate 'em, did he? Hope they give him indigestion! . . . . You mean I'm still head of the Homicide Bureau?"

"Don't keep rubbin' it in," Dugan sighed.

Millen sat down, stretched, yawned. "What do you gents want to know?"

A great deal, it transpired.

Millen said: "We knew that Dude Parris and his mob pulled that museum job. But what struck me as peculiar was that they could come to a strange town and pull a specialized sort of job like that and then disappear. They'd have to have local connections to get away with all that, and they didn't seem to have any—in the underworld.

"So on the theory that some insider had hired them, I talked to Percy Reese. He told me that Nicholas Deetsworth was pretty much of a screwball, and that he disliked Susan Clay and Mrs. Sylvester. That seemed a pretty cold lead, but I followed it—and found Deetsworth murdered.

"As near as I could figure, he'd been bumped off Tuesday night, and later on the coroner agreed he'd been dead at least twenty-four hours. Deetsworth was a queer bird who locked the world out while he worked—if I hadn't happened in, he might not have been found for days.

"Before he'd been killed, he'd been tortured. Why? He didn't have a lot of money. So I figured that whoever killed him must have been trying to locate his latest painting, 'The Murder of the Sea Lioness.'

"But again, why? Reese had told me that painting might or might not be valuable. Yet Deetsworth had gone to a lot of bother getting it out of his studio. He'd secretly sent it to the transfer and storage company warehouse, with orders to deliver it to the museum just before the exhibit. He'd wrapped it in two layers of paper, with instructions not to remove the second layer till the unveiling.

"All that looked as if he were afraid someone would steal it, if it stayed either in his studio or at the museum. Well, the killers evidently did go to his studio to steal it. When it wasn't there, they tried to torture its whereabouts from Deetsworth, but he kept quiet till the end.

"Deetsworth's check-stubs told me he'd recently paid a photographer eight dollars. I went to the photographer's place and found out that Deetsworth had hired him to take a picture of the painting. Then on Saturday somebody turned up and bought the plate for fifty bucks. That was Fletcher Ealey. He told the photographer Reese had sent him—but it was Wormhoudt. I'm coming to that later.

"WHAT Ealey overlooked was that the photographer always keeps a duplicate print in his files. Here it is. The man doing the murdering of the sea lioness is a dead-ringer for Wormhoudt, and that little mermaid with all the curves looks like the second Mrs. Wormhoudt.

"Well, I checked through all the stories and pictures from the *Tribune* morgue, and I found that Deetsworth once before had used people he knew in a painting. He pictured Reese and Susan Clay in his 'Indecision of a Crow.' I thought at the

time that might mean something, but it didn't. Just that Deetsworth had the nasty habit of picturing his friends as birds and fish.

"Deetsworth gave up being an architect in 1923—and gave up his office in the Exchange building. That was right after Wormhoudt bought that building. I figured Deetsworth was behind in his rent, and when a money-grabber like Wormhoudt bought the building, he ordered him to move out.

"But what had me going all along was why Wormhoudt bought a lot of Deetsworth's early work. Wormhoudt had about as much artistic sense as a steam shovel. Yet through the lean years he virtually supported Deetsworth by buying his junk.

"Well, I've been questioning Ealey at the hospital and Mrs. Wormhoudt here in jail. And here's the pay-off. All those years, Deetsworth was blackmailing Wormhoudt in a nice genteel way.

"In March of 1924 the first Mrs. Wormhoudt killed herself—so people thought. But it wasn't that way. Wormhoudt had married her for her dough. He never cared for her, but she was always crazy about him. Wormhoudt fell for his secretary, Floretta Conrad, and on the night of Maud Wormhoudt's death, she —his wife—went to his office to have it out. There was a big scene, and in a fit of rage Wormhoudt shot her. Fixed it up to look like a suicide.

"But someone else besides Floretta Conrad witnessed the shooting. In the hall outside the office a colored janitor named Genesis Lincoln Brown was working. When he heard a lot of screaming inside, he sneaked into the outer office. Put his ear to the inner office door. When he heard a shot, he yanked open the door and saw Wormhoudt with the gun, and Mrs. Wormhoudt dying.

"Wormhoudt promised to pension off Brown at three hundred a month for life if he'd swear he saw Mrs. Wormhoudt killing herself. Brown agreed. But by June of that year the money had gone to Brown's head, and he was doing a lot of drinking. One night he called Wormhoudt and demanded that the pension be doubled. Wormhoudt instructed him to meet him at a certain dark spot on Park Boulevard. When they met, Wormhoudt slugged him and ran over his body with his car till Brown was dead.

"There was alcohol on Brown's breath, and the police figured he'd staggered into the street and been hit. There wasn't much investigation, for he was just a dinge without any influence.

"Very sorry," said Wimsell, "but these gentlemen—"

"Wormhoudt married his secretary, so she could never be made to testify against him. He thought the incident was buried deep. Then one day in the fall of 1924 Deetsworth turned up in his office. What he said set Wormhoudt back on his heels.

"DEETSWORTH was a screwy artist without any sense of time or business. One March night in 1924, he'd suddenly got the idea of trading Wormhoudt one of his paintings for that back rent. Maybe he thought that if the word went out that Wormhoudt had bought one of his paintings, other people would follow suit.

"Well, you or I would have written Wormhoudt a letter about it, or made an appointment. But not Deetsworth. He called Wormhoudt's home, and a servant said that Wormhoudt was at his office, and that Mrs. Wormhoudt was out. So Deetsworth grabbed his hat and hot-footed it for the office. He wandered into the dark outer office a minute or two after Mrs. Wormhoudt was shot. He overheard Wormhoudt offering Brown money.

"Deetsworth knew he'd blundered into a mess. The affair scared him—and he slipped away as quietly as he came.

"But as the months passed and he began missing more meals, he thought he was a dope to starve when he knew that about Wormhoudt. So in the fall, he went to Wormhoudt, hinted at what he knew and suggested that Wormhoudt buy a painting. I gather that it was all pretty vague and shadowy—what he said.

"Wormhoudt knew that Deetsworth was wise to something—but he didn't know to how much. It seemed the easiest thing to do—to buy a painting and let

things ride for a time. Wormhoudt knew that as the years passed, Deetsworth's story would seem screwy to the police, if he ever spilled it. We naturally would have demanded to know why he hadn't told it before.

"THINGS rode along. Deetsworth didn't put the screws on Wormhoudt for very much money—just enough to live frugally, and paint. And after he won the Kettle Gallery prize, and the money started rolling in, he stopped blackmailing Wormhoudt entirely.

"Till six weeks ago. Suddenly he went to Wormhoudt and demanded a half-million dollars. Wormhoudt cussed him and told him to go chase himself. Told him he could be sent up for blackmail and for keeping mum about the crime. So Deetsworth left—but he began to paint 'The Murder of the Sea Lioness.'

"That wasn't blackmail—naw! It was just a painting. He could tell the police that it was entirely fanciful—that it was just coincidence that the man looked like Wormhoudt, and the sea lioness looked like poor fat old Mrs. Wormhoudt Number One, and the mermaid like the second Mrs. Wormhoudt.

"Deetsworth may have been a screwball—but he was pretty smart on a certain plane. He had a picture taken of the painting, sent the painting itself to the Edwards warehouse, and sent the photograph by messenger to Wormhoudt. Not by mail—which wasn't so dumb. No G-men were going to get him. With the photo he sent a nice note. He said he thought Mr. Wormhoudt would enjoy seeing that photo of his latest painting. And he wrote: 'It will be unveiled at my exhibit opening next Wednesday, unless of course you should wish to buy it at the price we discussed.'

"That was putting the heat on white-hot. A half-million! And Wormhoudt thought if he paid that, Deetsworth would be back for more.

"So Wormhoudt went to Fletcher Ealey and put his cards face up. Ealey has the heart of a crook and the mind of a snake. Sure, he could arrange things. It would take money, but he could do it.

"The photographer had stamped his studio's name on the back of the print, so Ealey went there first and bought the plate. Then he gave his servants a month's vacation on pay, sent his wife and daughter to Florida, and went to Chicago himself. He knows his way around the underworld in this section of the country, and he got in touch with Parris.

"Parris and three companions came to town Monday night, put their car in Ealey's garage and occupied the servants' quarters above the garage. Tuesday night they went to Deetsworth's. Wormhoudt thought the painting must be there, for he'd been checking with the museum, and Reese had told him it hadn't arrived.

"But the painting wasn't there, and Deetsworth wouldn't talk. They killed him, and left. Wormhoudt and Ealey decided that Parris and his mob would have to steal the painting from the exhibit. To throw police off the trail, they arranged for Parris to stick up the crowd—Wormhoudt and his wife along with the rest. Well, one of Parris' men had a nervous trigger-finger and killed a couple of women. Then Parris and the other three drove back to Ealey's garage. Ealey got the painting, gave it to Wormhoudt, and he destroyed it.

"I began to suspect Wormhoudt after I saw that photo. I thought the best way to panic him would be to arrest his wife and let him read a story in the *Tribune* saying that Deetsworth had kept a diary.

"It scared him, all right. He drove over to Ealey's to talk about what to do. The boys and I just followed him."

INSPECTOR DUGAN said: "But why did Deetsworth demand a half-million, all at once? He was famous—his paintings were selling. Why didn't he put the heat on Wormhoudt for more money before? And why did he phone the Commissioner?"

"I figured he phoned Breck on Tuesday night because he had a hunch that Wormhoudt wouldn't take it lying down. Maybe he suspected Wormhoudt would pull something at the museum. He must have used the pay telephone in the hall just a few minutes before Parris came.

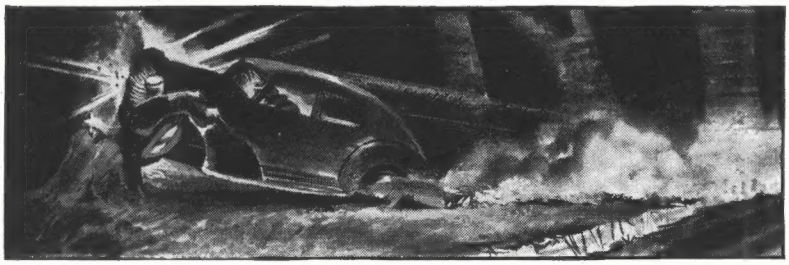
"And as for his putting the heat so strong on Wormhoudt—I found some returned checks in his desk made out to Dr. Sylvester, who's a damned good eye, ear, nose and throat man. His wife happened to be killed at the museum, but that had nothing to do with Deetsworth.

"Deetsworth's eyes have always been poor, and two months ago Dr. Sylvester told him he was going blind. A blind man can't make a living as a painter. So Deetsworth decided to feather his nest for life by getting that half million."

Another story by Thomas Duncan will appear in an early issue.

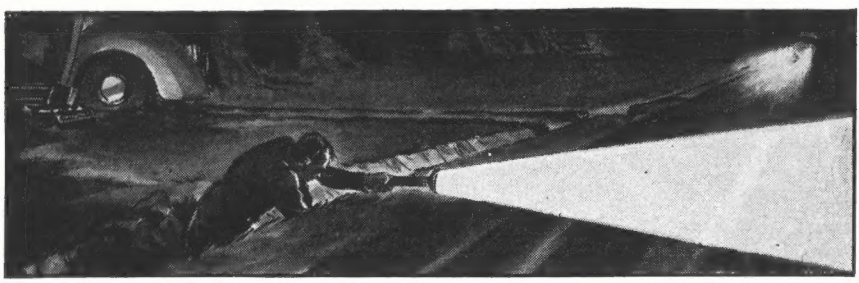
"MY CRIES WERE WHISPERS AS MY LIFE EBBED!"

A true experience of P. S. NICHOLLS, *South Bend, Ind.*



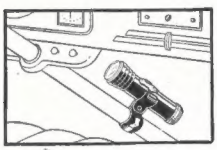
"LATE ONE NIGHT, returning from a fishing trip, I dozed at the wheel of my car while going at a fast clip," writes Mr. Nicholls. "Suddenly there was a blinding crash!

"MY CAR HAD VEERED off the road and smashed head on into a tree. My throat was gashed and bleeding badly. I was able only to whisper—and seemed doomed to die in the inky darkness. Then . . .



". . . I REMEMBERED MY FLASHLIGHT! Somehow I managed to get it from my tackle box and crawl weakly back to the road. Quickly the bright beam of the flashlight, waved in my feeble grasp, stopped a motorist, who took me to a hospital just in time. There is no doubt that I owe my life to dependable 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries!

(Signed) P. S. Nicholls"



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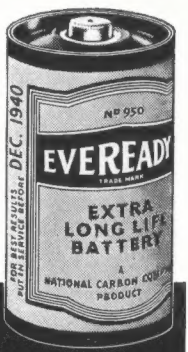

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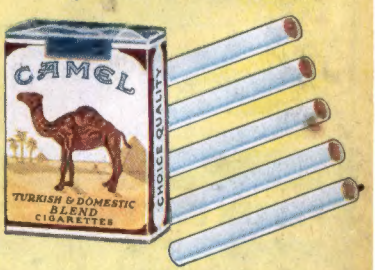

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